DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 811 UD 013 221

AUTHOR	Clemens, Rosemary A.
TITLE	An Examination of Policy Making in an Urban Setting. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	New York Univ., N.Y. School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Regional Research Program.
BUREAU NO	BR-2-B-021
PUB DATE	Oct 72
GRANT	OEG-2-22B021
NOTE	235p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$9.87
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Policy; Board of Education Policy; *City Government; City Officials; City Problems; Conflict Resolution; Decision Making; Educational Administration; *Educational Policy; Governance; *Policy Formation; Political Issues; *Public Policy; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS	*New York City

ABSTRACT

This study, a political history, analyzes three educational crises in New York City during the last 25 years. Primary attention is given to the mayoralty in an attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of his power in education. This research analyzes his role by eliciting the actual operations of decision making (participants involved, exertion of power, wielding of influence, and the where and how of conducting negotiations); identifying and assessing common and unique characteristics in each crisis; and integrating the findings to increase our store of knowledge about urban educational governance. These studies of the administrations of Mayors LaGuardia, Wagner, and Lindsay demonstrate that politics and education have been closely intertwined in New York City's history. The mayor has usually played a prominent role in educational crises, for when problems arose, the citizenry, along with the crisis participants, looked to the mayor for direction and solutions. Mayors have usually been rendered powerless when trying to shatter the education-sans-politics myth openly. Education has become an integral part of urban life closely tied to the politics of the city. Educational leadership and responsibility have been lacking in the educational community. Educational governance in the future will be effective only when its officials are able to lead, account, negotiate, and compromise. (Author/JM)

2-8-021

Approved 12/1/72

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FINAL REPORT

Project No. 2B021
Grant No. OEG-2-22B021

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AN EXAMINATION OF POLICY MAKING IN AN URBAN SETTING

October 1972

UD 013221

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Office of Education

National Center for Educational Research and Development
(Regional Research Program)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to the following: The Danforth Foundation who sponsored a study of decision-making in New York City schools and of which study I was a research assistant. My dissertation grew out of my work on that study. In addition to the Director of the project, Professor Richard C. Lonsdale, I wish to thank Professor Frank Lutz, consultant to the Danforth project. Professor Louis Koenig of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of New York University and all committee members, especially the chairman, are thanked.

ABSTRACT

This study, a political history, analyzes three educational crises in New York City during the last 25 years. Primary attention is given to the mayoralty in an attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of his power in education. Prior research has given scant notice to mayoralty involvement in education, generally assuming that he has had none.

This research analyzes his role by eliciting the actual operations of decision-making (participants involved, exertion of power, wielding of influence and the where and how of conducting negotiations); identifying and assessing common and unique characteristics in each crisis; and integrating the findings to increase our store of knowledge about urban educational governance.

What emerges from these case studies are the following: mayors have played a role in education but usually have been rendered powerless when trying to shatter the education-sans-politics myth openly. Mayor Wagner, of the three mayors studied (Mayors LaGuardia and Lindsay being the other two), exercising leadership in policy-making quietly and covertly, was effective. More enlightening, the studies show that education has become an integral part of urban life closely tied to the politics of the city; that educational leadership and responsi-

bility have been lacking in the educational community; and that educational governance in the future will be effective only when its officials are able to lead, account, negotiate and compromise. One suggestion for governance of school systems focuses on a mayor-appointed commissioner who would provide leadership and be responsible to the educational constituency and the mayor.

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The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a grant with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under Government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the project. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

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Office of Education
National Center for Educational Research and Development
Regional Research Program

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PREFACE

Over the last few years, newspapers, magazine and journal articles, as well as first-hand experiences, have been alerting all of us to the problems of urban school systems throughout the nation, problems that have centered around finances, curriculum, construction, student unrest, teacher strikes. The list continues to grow, problems mushroom, time elapses, educational groups, civic groups, parents dialogue, negotiations deteriorate. Somewhere along the way, the mayor's help is sought. Paradoxically, while seeking his aid, the educational establishment continues to publicly proclaim its devotion to the principle that politics have no place in the educational arena. The pattern has become all too set of late.

This pattern will be the subject of the following case studies with the intention of dispelling the long-held myth that education is devoid of politics by focusing in depth on one particular part of the pattern--the role of the mayor.

This role will be analyzed over a twenty-five year period in New York City with the hope of answering both historical and political questions--what common and unique characteristics determine a mayor's role in education, how,

when and why was a mayor successful or unsuccessful in resolving educational problems.

CHAPTER I

LA GUARDIA - THE MAN

> After all, did not everyone of us descend from immigrant stock? Some arrived on the Mayflower ... many more in the steerage.
>
> F. H. LaGuardia

LaGuardia knew that those who carried a Mayflower passport represented the privileged class of New York for they had wealth, social standing, professional expertise and enough power and influence in many areas of city life to command considerable attention and deference. He also knew that the steerage set entered this country empty-handed, willing to seize any opportunity that might offer economic growth and success. They could not command attention, let alone anything else. He could personally testify to that. Fiorello LaGuardia wanted to command, to have power, to have influence.

He was born in one of the city's dark and crowded 19th century tenements on the lower East Side -- a haven for those newly-arrived immigrants from steerage. His father, a musician by occupation, had joined the Army as leader of the 11th U.S. Infantry Band. The sound of the bugle, soon after LaGuardia's first glance at New York, took them West, to

Arizona in fact, where they settled and grew. LaGuardia's early life was spent reacting then to rural rather than urban stimuli--the Western landscape generally, with pioneers, cowboys and folk heroes; the one-room schoolhouse, a potpourri of basic skills and Wild West stories; and a variety of different neighbors. Some were Indians, few were Italian or Jewish, most were Anglo-Saxons, West Point men to be exact. They were the commissioned officers, the ones who dominated life on any Army base.[1] The "most" then had a certain distinction that set them apart from the "some" and the "few." That distinction was made extremely plain to LaGuardia early in his life when an organ-grinder appeared at their base. He played music, sang in Italian and had a monkey dance. All LaGuardia's friends, the officers' kids, laughed. But their laughter first was directed at the monkey, then at LaGuardia. The foreign musician could only communicate with LaGuardia's father. That set them apart somehow and made them different--but that difference offered no distinction. LaGuardia was puzzled: "The kids taunted me for a long time after that. I couldn't understand it. What difference was there between us?"[2] When the going got rough LaGuardia fought--"I would

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1. Jay Franklin Carter, LaGuardia (New York: Modern Age Books, 1937), pp. 1-11.

2. Fiorello H. LaGuardia, The Making of an Insurgent (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1948), p. 27.

just as soon fight with an officer's kid as I would with anyone else."[3] As years passed, the officer's kid would take many forms.

Two impressions that had a significant impact on LaGuardia occurred early in his life: one was something he witnessed daily, the other he read about weekly. Daily he would see Indians. They were most unlike his Army base companions--they were hungry for food. Some white men, profiteers hungry for quick money, sold their government allotments to miners and general stores. The Indians had no power to stop it. LaGuardia promised himself to fight that fight for them.

Weekly, LaGuardia read Joseph Pultizer's newspaper, New York World. It told of Tammany Hall's corrupt practices--of using the innocent immigrant's votes to keep it in power and fill its pockets. The immigrant went hungry as the Tammany tiger grew fat. They had no power to stop it either. Undoubtedly, to a young person, it was related easily to what he witnessed close at hand. The Indian, the immigrant, the officer's kid again.

The form that probably made the most indelible mark and cemented a young boy's crusading dreams into adult commit-

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3. Ibid., p. 19.

ments was the death of his father. Profiteers, this time in the clothes of Army contractors, sold diseased beef to the government at exorbitant rates. His father became ill as a result of eating some of it, was discharged from the service, returned with his family to Italy to die a few years later.

The young boy quickly became a man. He was employed first, through a family friend, in the American consulate in Budapest--one of the cultural highlights of Europe during that time. For a young man without formal schooling, beyond an Arizona elementary education, it offered many opportunities. LaGuardia took advantage of them, learning various languages, studying history, reading anything and everything on current events, listening to music, seeking advancement. He progressed nicely in all areas except the latter, for the Foreign Service then militated against that happening--LaGuardia was not Anglo-Saxon, he was not Harvard-trained, he was not politically sponsored by a U.S. dignitary. This was a club for the elite and he was different. He left the State Department in 1906 after merely two years claiming "that...service is not the place for a young man to work up...."[4]

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4. Arthur Mann, LaGuardia Comes to Power--1933 (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), p. 27.

To work up meant he had to return to America. New York would be where he would fight the officer's kid. First, however, he needed a job, then an education, then an occupation. He accomplished all in less than a decade.

His job was that of an interpreter at Ellis Island for the U.S. Immigration Service, where he witnessed frightened Europeans receive harsh treatment. Whether they were turned away or admitted they faced a bleak picture--to be sent back without money or family was terrifying but just as terrifying was entering a city that would easily gobble them up, by many profiteers--the most insidious being their supposed friend, the political leader of their district. He would give them a turkey, get them a job with one hand and take their vote and promised allegiance with the other.[5] That promised allegiance would secure votes for the political leaders and the Party continued existence in maintaining power and control in the city. And the immigrant? His flat would be overpriced, his working conditions unsatisfactory, his municipal services negligible. The political leaders did nothing to correct these conditions.

His education, as one can imagine took two forms: formally he attended New York University's Law School at night; informally he observed the plight of the immigrant,

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5. Carter, op. cit., pp. 24-5.

studied their exploiters and got to know city life. Somehow, the formal wedded to the informal would determine how the fight would be fought. By 1910, with LL.B. in hand he took the first step--he began to practice law. His clients were primarily the immigrant contacts he had made at Ellis Island. They always had problems--deportation proceedings, swindles, evictions, contract violations. He helped them either remain here, or keep their tenement flats, or regain their few lost dollars. But that wasn't truly improving their condition. These were merely skirmishes. He realized that to be helpful, to fulfill his commitments he would have to "make law, not merely...construe it."[6] For a young ethnic lawyer to be successful in New York politics the usual route was through the Democratic Party--the Party that held the power. The Party that seemed both to make and construe the laws. But LaGuardia remembered the Indian, his father, the Ellis Island immigrant--the victims of entrenched power. He knew there was only one avenue open to him: "a party in the minority cannot help being good and pure,..."[7] He registered himself in the Republican Party. Little did he realize at that time that being in the minority was not synonymous with being virtuous.

He found it out quickly enough when his political club leader queried "Who wants to run for Congress?" and

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6. LaGuardia, op. cit., p. 101.

7. Ibid., p. 31.

LaGuardia answered "I do." The contest took place in his home territory, the 14th Congressional District, that section between 4th and 14th Streets from the Hudson to the East Rivers. As expected, it included the tenement sections of the East Side, populated with Italian and Jewish immigrants[8] and LaGuardia used his knowledge of both the language and the plight and needs of the immigrants to seek votes. However, Tammany controlled the district and the immigrants. Their candidate was re-elected, but only by a margin of 1,700 votes. Usually the margin ran at least 16,000. Although LaGuardia lost, he had made himself known in the district and received a substantial vote. He tried again two years later much against his Party's wishes. This time he was pretty much on his own, the Party playing a neutral role. LaGuardia wanted that office and if it meant building up his own organization of campaign workers, and poll watchers and vote counters he would. He did. He won by a mere 350 votes but he got that Washington seat. Elated he entered the 14th district headquarters to overhear a Republican leader talking to a Democratic leader: "No Joe, we didn't doublecross you. We didn't do anything for this fellow. You just can't control him."[9] Both Democrats and Republicans would repeat that latter statement often.

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8. Carter, op. cit., p. 34; LaGuardia, op. cit., p. 104.

9. LaGuardia, op. cit., p. 127.

LaGuardia went to Washington when the 65th Congress convened. H.R. Bill 345 was introduced. It made the fraudulent sale of war materials (including diseased beef) a felony punishable by death during wartime, imprisonment in time of peace. It was LaGuardia's first bill in Congress.[10] The first fight would be for his father.

While Washington was being introduced to LaGuardia, New York Republicans were considering introducing him to the city at large. The presidency of the Board of Aldermen (later to be renamed the City Council) was a possibility for Republican representation--a rare opportunity that could be enlarged upon if the right candidate was presented, a candidate that would appeal to the rising Italian and Jewish constituencies. LaGuardia was the New York County Republican leader's choice. The Republicans saw this as a golden opportunity for two reasons: first, the Democratic candidate was ill and would not wage a good fight and second it would be a three-way contest--with an Irishman running on the Liberty Party ticket. Hopefully, enough Irish votes would be cast for the Liberty candidate to draw away a substantial number from the Democratic candidate.[11] A Republican could thus squeak through. LaGuardia, while retaining his Congressional seat, made the race. He had nothing to lose and everything to gain, for a win would

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10. Ibid., p. 146.

11. Carter, op. cit., p. 54.

situate him closer to his goal--destroying Tammany through the highest seat of municipal power--the mayoralty. It was a chance worth taking. The fight would be played by the rules of the game for "he regarded politics as a game. It was just a chess game."[12] Tammany had defined the rules and was his rival. He would checkmate them by using their own method--ethnic politics--against them. The Italian and Jew would be his weapons. He thus became a professional politician, one not afraid to stoop to shrewd and perhaps even sordid activities to win. He prized himself on "out demagoguing the best Tammany demagogue" and claimed he "... invented the low blow."[13] Needless to say, it helped him win the Board of Aldermen seat, by all of 1,500 votes. Even more important, the Tammany Irish for the first time in New York had split their votes between the Party candidate and the Liberal Party Irishman, causing devastating results. An Italian Republican won. The year was 1919.

It was LaGuardia's chance to really become an effective leader--not only to mediate and negotiate but to initiate policy. That was what he craved. He cut his real political teeth then in that seat, learning the mechanics of

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12. The Reminiscences of Francis R. Stoddard, New York State Republican Committee Member (New York: Columbia University Oral History Research Office, 1949), pp. 9, 16, 17.

13. Mann, op. cit., p. 29.

the various departments and agencies of city government. It was here that he first encountered the education hierarchy.

It all centered around the controversial Gary plan for city schools. Should the Board of Aldermen vote for Gary schools or conventional schools?

The Gary school philosophy focused on an educational system that had been introduced in the schools of Gary, Indiana and had proven so successful. It stressed the need for the full development of the child by offering all students a variety of activities that involved not only intellectual study, but play and exercise, manual work in shops and laboratories and creative activity utilizing the community. Thus a school plant would not merely be a complex of classrooms but would provide playgrounds and gardens, gymnasiums and swimming pools, special drawing and music studios, science laboratories and machine shops.[14] The ideal Gary school would offer daily all the different activities which influenced a well-rounded human being. The student, himself, would be able to choose the activities he was best suited for and develop them to the greatest extent possible.[15]

New York adopted this plan in a few select schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn. It stirred up controversy as any

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14. R. S. Bourne, The Gary Schools (Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1961), pp. 14-15.

15. Ibid., p. 15.

innovation or change does, but in education it always seemed to be commingled with emotions and high-flung rhetoric. Partially, it is understandable, for education of one's own child is a closely guarded privilege. To experiment with the Department of Sanitation, i.e. whether there should be daily or weekly refuse collections is one thing, to experiment with a child's development is quite another. John Dewey led the "pro" side of the discussion. He claimed "no more important question affecting the future of the people of New York has come before them for many years."[16] The Rockefeller Foundation granted funds to study and evaluate the demonstration schools in New York, believing that their faith in this kind of education for urban children would be confirmed unhesitatingly. The Public Education Association, a young reform group primarily concerned with protecting public education from political expediency, at first cautiously viewed the plan. Later the PEA stated that: "...this plan had been in operation in New York City for several months before this Association was won over to its support by the enthusiasm of the principals of the two original Gary schools in this city who believed that it would give the vast army of boys and girls in our public schools

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16. Ibid., p. 12.

advantages which only the children of the rich were receiving, in the better private schools."[17]

LaGuardia agreed.[18] It would be his second fight--this one for the Indian and immigrant kid. The students would be offered music and art, sports, gardens and playgrounds. How could anyone be against it?

But the "con" side indeed was. Mayor Hylan specifically saw it as a program sponsored by the wealthy industrialists to further their fortunes -- "merely educating children of the masses for the ... factory professions (undoubtedly the reasoning here was that they offered shop courses and other manual activities) instead of fitting them for the higher professions."[19] The Board of Education quickly agreed. They saw the plan as an overt effort of the industrialists, the Rockefeller's in particular, to meddle in education policy-making in city schools. They thus would use all the clout they could muster to destroy the plan.

A New York Times editorial addressed itself to the continuing issue:

> If any such conspiracy existed, of course, the mayor's indignation would be justified, but he would have enormous difficulty in proving that "the Rockefeller's and the Gary's"

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17. New York Times, September 29, 1921.

18. Interview with Louis Yavner, Commissioner of Investigation LaGuardia Administration, December 29, 1971.

19. New York Times, August 9, 1920.

ever had said or done anything indicative of a desire to deprive any boy or girl of an opportunity, a fair chance, to acquire all the education which he or she had the desire and the ability to acquire.[20]

LaGuardia acted too. He exhorted the Board of Education to defend its position, showing the advantages of the conventional over the innovative. They would not. They would not allow any Board of Aldermen member, president or not, to make them account. They had the mayor, a strong Tammany figure, on their side anyway. They could and would defeat both the Gary Plan and LaGuardia.[21]

As LaGuardia left the Board at the end of 1921, he advised the Aldermen "to be more independent, to guard their powers and use them for themselves."[22] He reflected: "You can compel every commissioner in the city to come here and make an accounting to this office.[23] Somehow, though, LaGuardia knew that the Board of Education, like the officer's kid, was different, with distinction, and had removed itself from that directive.

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20. New York Times, September 29, 1921.

21. Interview with Louis Yavner, op. cit.

22. New York Times, December 28, 1921.

23. Ibid.

CHAPTER II

LA GUARDIA - THE MAYOR

> He did what no New York City mayor had done before...: he proved that one could be an authentic reformer without being a stuffed shirt or a fool about political realities.
>
> Arthur Mann,
> biographer of LaGuardia

Although he left the Board of Aldermen in the early 1920's he was indeed not ready to leave municipal politics behind. His bid for the mayoralty in 1921 proved disasterous but he had learned certain realities of the political world - he could never be elected mayor on a Republican ticket alone against Tammany. In addition, Tammany would have to be blatantly vulnerable for attack if its walls were to crumble. LaGuardia waited and watched. A decade later he knew the time had come.

The Depression had deeply affected everyone in the country, not only economically but psychologically: the value all held so tenaciously--economic success--now seemed empty. In particular, the New York City dweller was hard-hit and while standing uneasily on bread lines he

began to question the continued prosperity of his political leaders. The once politically apathetic city dweller started to rebel against the get quick rich schemes of the politicians.

The rebellion took the form of a court-appointed commission to investigate Tammany and its leaders. It sought the answer to one basic question: were the Democratic Party leaders serving the public good in an honest, efficient way?[1]

The inquirer was a reformer with a Mayflower passport. What made this commission different from others that reformers directed was that this Mayflower was different. Samuel Seabury indeed blossomed and travelled among the elite. His family pedigree was impeccable, he was a direct descendant of the early settlers of America. However, unlike his cloistered colleagues who viewed government and the changing New York population with a distant eye, Seabury had practical experience in how government worked and what immigrant groups wanted. Although socially his stock was high, financially his family had been bankrupt for some time. His formal schooling then, much like LaGuardia's, consisted of little more than a good elementary education. He lacked both preparatory and college credentials. He became a prestigious attorney only after working his way through law school and struggling to establish a practice. To compete successfully

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1. Mann, op. cit., p. 5.

with large law firms meant, especially in New York in those days, if not even today, an alliance with politics. Seabury became a Democrat, a successful one, being elected to the City Court and then the State Supreme Court. By the time he was barely 40, he sat on the Court of Appeals' bench. He learned much during those years, especially about the vulnerable cracks in the Tammany walls.

By the time he was called upon to conduct the investigation of Tammany, he had removed himself from elective politics, had retired from active law practice and was enjoying life. He had had time to reflect and digest his past experiences and to philosophize. When the time came he was ready effectively to move the commission--not to single out individuals as those other Mayflower commissionsdid, but to seek to destroy the machinery that both created those individuals and sanctioned their activities.[2] As children starved and women begged, Tammany chieftains had grown obese. Reform must come, born not from civic concern but from depression, hunger and despair.

LaGuardia saw his chance for his third fight--this time it would be not only for his father, for the Indian, for the Ellis Island and East Side immigrant--it would also be for himself. He wanted to be the first to

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2. Mann, op. cit., pp. 39, 42, 46, 47.

completely destroy Tammany. Not only would the organ-grinder daughter stop but he would have the power to make his own music.

Tammany had taught him two invaluable lessons in making audible music.

One, that the man who could make himself useful and indispensible to the poor and foreign-born of a metropolis, give them a turkey and a job and get their vote, had his hand on tremendous power.[3] LaGuardia had already built up support with the foreign-born population of the city by de-Westernizing himself, by playing up his ancestry--a Jewish mother, an Italian father, a Protestant religion, and had won various elections--even the city-wide Board of Aldermen's president's chair.

Two, the road to political success had two lanes, but the Democratic Party usually controlled the road. The Republicans could never control it alone and more times than not sold out to the Democrats. "No Joe, we didn't double-cross you," echoed in LaGuardia's ears. He also knew that when corruption mushroomed to unprecedented levels an anti-Tammany coalition usually was formed. This type of political coalition usually comprised disenchanted Democrats, conservative Republicans, the business community, civic and good

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3. Carter, op. cit., p. 25.

government associations. It was called a Fusion alliance and ran on a reform platform: root out corruption. According to Lowi's analysis, and evidence seems to bear it out at least in New York, reform movements are cyclic phenomena,[4] reformers are elected to office after long Tammany control only to disappear after one term, usually accomplishing little and alienating their constituencies. Disillusioned, reformers either retreat to their garden or return to the Tammany fold.

The problem then for LaGuardia would be how one would go about securing political endorsement, for the Fusion Conference Committee had made it plain that it was their time to command and it was going to be a Mayflower on their slate. LaGuardia remembered quickly his early political days, trying to get Republican endorsement and support and how he had to build up his own organization. He wanted to run, he wanted to be mayor but he knew he would need endorsements this time to both run and win. So he would cajole, say what the elite reformers wanted to hear, play the buffoon. "I'm very proud to be here tonight. But I don't know whether you ladies and gentlemen (of the elite) have decided to admit me to the social register, or whether you just wanted to go slumming with me."[5] Indeed, the

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4. Theodore Lowi, At the Pleasure of the Mayor (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 177-79. For a full discussion of urban reform and fusion movements, see pp. 183-190. See also: Theodore Lowi, "Machine Politics--Old and New," The Public Interest, No. 9 (Fall, 1967), p. 86.
5. Mann, op. cit., p. 76.

reformers must have thought the latter as they laughed. The "half Wop, half American, half Republican"[6] could never be their choice.

"I want to defeat Tammany" wrote one member of the gentry to another but "I feel as I did in the beginning that a crude, brawling, loud-mouthed person like LaGuardia is the surest way to defeat that end."[7] "If it's LaGuardia or bust," another fusionist stated, "I prefer bust."[8]

Bust it would have been, except for the position and experience of Seabury. He was riding higher than ever as a result of his commission's findings and the Mayflower reformers had to acknowledge him as their official leader. In order to follow-through on his findings, Seabury wanted a winning candidate. He began to receive soundings to counteract the voices of the reformers. Wallace Sayre, professor of New York University, student of municipal politics and a well-known and respected figure in reform and good government groups, saw LaGuardia as the best possible candidate, one with a splendid record, with appeal to liberals and the matter-of-fact allegiance of some 400,000 Italian voters. It was nothing to downgrade and Seabury knew it. He convinced his Fusion

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6. Ibid., p. 69.
7. Ibid., p. 72.
8. Ibid., p. 76.

colleagues, but only after many undignified shouting matches. Asked in a calmer moment why he would possibly have selected LaGuardia, he replied: "He's absolutely honest, he's a man of great courage, and he can win."[9]

LaGuardia thus got Fusion's endorsement but would the man in the street, the middle-class voter, overcome his prejudice against "Goo Goos" (good government groups), for these groups had a reputation for being impractical, ineffective, snobbish and, more importantly, were known as losers?[10] He would have to dispel those prejudices quickly and by using the press sensitively to maximize his strengths he was successful. Thus LaGuardia sought to fuse all voters by developing his campaign into a crusade. His rhetoric took the form of a savior: "Ours is not a political contest. We are fighting against a cruel, vicious political system...we want to wrest control from the political bosses and make our city what we want it to be, a great big, beautiful, kind New York."[11]

The period of the 1930's was the right time for LaGuardia. The Tammany scandals, the Depression, Fusion sponsorship, ethnic support, crusade rhetoric, spelled success. An Italian-American became mayor.

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9. Ibid., p. 80.
10. Ibid., p. 88.
11. Ibid., p. 104.

"The Fusion administration is now in charge of our city, our theory of municipal government is an experiment,...if we succeed, I am sure success in other cities is possible."[12]

The experiment would take a new turn, for not only would it be concerned with destroying Tammany, it would create something better. And LaGuardia, the mayor, would do the creating. That was a given.

One particular area of concern to LaGuardia was education. Whatever his motivations--his early awareness of the Board's intransigence with the Gary Plan, or a possible threatening element to his stewardship of the whole city, or his reputed interest in children, or his own educational inadequacies--he took an early interest in education and met head-on with the school establishment.

LaGuardia during his reform campaign outlined an educational program that started with a Board that was comprised of competent, conscientious, nonpolitical, "high calibre" people. Enlightened leadership had to come first, he maintained, before overhauling the system. In addition, as a reform candidate, he pledged to eliminate politics from education, not only in the appointment of Board members but in school site selection and construction. His only caveat

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12. Ibid., p. 20.

was that it was perfectly proper for him to interfere in the school system, after all he was the mayor and whether it was the police department or the education department, made no difference--he wanted it to function.

The early years of his administration were marked by positive interference in education. Fundamentally, that means lending the prestige of the mayor's office to advance the ideas or wishes of the educational establishment, he seriously threatened no one. So far, no one complained.

As a result of the Depression a tight budget was felt by most city departments, including the Board of Education. Tammany had cut the Board's budget by $18 million in 1933 which resulted in salary deductions for teachers and a halt to the school construction program. Specialized services in various agencies of the board were curtailed and class size was increased. Teacher morale was low and cries for overhauling the system were often advanced by special interest groups. LaGuardia moved quickly by restoring the budget cuts in the first three years of his administration, allocating by 1938 a sum of $97 million to education.

Next, he saw a chance to win back a small part of the Gary plan--offer students a chance to develop their natural talents to the highest degree possible. He had asked the Board to start construction of a high school of music and art for gifted children of the city. The mayor's plan called for

the construction of that institution and then development of it into a conservatory under municipal control. The Board accepted the first plan without a hitch and construction started quickly. Even the newspapers praised his direct approach in education:

> The mayor's suggestion of a separate high school of art shows a gratifying appreciation of real values....The mayor has given the finer things recognition even in these days when 'practical' things are so demanding. These finer things are not frills.[13]

Two years later, 1936, the high school opened. The Board could work harmoniously with a mayor as long as its interests were protected and its jurisdiction enlarged.

Negative political interference by the mayor--taking a position that collides with one or more of the powerholders in the educational establishment is something else entirely, and no matter how beneficient his prior actions might have been with regard to them, the establishment will seek to render a mayor ineffective. The interference is usually heavy-handed and open, using the prestige of his office with its attendant power and influence. Too, it usually attacks both the policy-making and administration of

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13. New York Times, February 3, 1934.

the Board. In both cases, the educational powers easily and quickly yell "politics" and generate enough public sentiment to make the mayor retreat. Such was the case of LaGuardia's adventure into education in 1943.

During the war years, LaGuardia interfered negatively. Beset with a tight financial situation he sought to cut corners in every conceivable nook and cranny of city government and eventually focused on education. One particular area in education where money seemed to be unduly wasted was in the Board's Bureau of Supplies. Two investigations had discovered that the Bureau was inefficient and duplicated the work of the City's Department of Purchase. A study commission estimated that $500,000 could be saved if the Board's Bureau was absorbed by the City's Department. LaGuardia introduced a bill in the City Council calling for just this action.

Hopefully, the City Council would be more effective in education than the Board of Aldermen had been, 20 years before. Furthermore, he was a reform mayor, not a Tammany chieftain, and could exercise more power than he did as president of the Board of Aldermen, or so he reasoned. The Board would have no part of this scheme. Even though it was aware of the money-saving purposes of such a move, it considered its position more closely: it would be relinquish-

ing control over school supplies, and even though supplies were only one small part of its operation, it would mean diminution of power, possible weakening of its entire structure.[14] Public groups saw only political overtones in such a plan. Fears were engendered that this week it would be a city take-over of pencils, next week pupils. The bill was scuttled. The Board had won again.

LaGuardia thrived on success in stewarding the city, his city, for success in encounters with his commissioners and departments meant essentially increased power and recognition--in addition to the attention of others, applause, fame and glory--and this any effective politician not only needs but craves. Because he was defeated in education, it meant a decrease in power. Education had always been his Achilles Heel. He would be vulnerable again. But he had won toomany fights and battled uphill too many times to be intimidated.

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14. Charles Garrett, The LaGuardia Years (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 201.

CHAPTER III

THE 1945 KARELSON CRISIS

> It was obvious that the schools could not solve the problems by themselves.
>
> Yavner Report

The schools are in crisis! Teenage hoodlumism in New York has increased enormously! Juvenile delinquency in Brooklyn is steadily increasing! A trend toward youthful gangs is clearly seen! High school drop-out rates are higher than ever! Negro and white students clash! And so the newspapers reported. The years were war years -- 1943, 1944 and 1945. The Board of Education could not meet the challenge. One Board member, retiring after ten years service, at the time quipped in frustration: "I'm still surprised after 10 years, how the school man's mind tends to say: 'it has not been done and it can't be done.' No lawyer or doctor could survive on such a formula--the trouble with school men is that detail dulls their imagination."[1]

In order to fire their imagination, a group of reformers formed an Educator's Committee on Human Relations to develop and publicize its movement which centered on

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1. New York Times, March 7, 1945.

intercultural education. What this movement involved was an effort to mobilize the home, school and community in a joint attack on prejudice and intolerance by stressing the diverse contributions of all groups to American culture. Perhaps in this way conflict, delinquency, gangs, riots, could be reduced. The schools were the chief place for this to happen. They met to exchange ideas and make recommendations about a human relations program at 110 Livingston Street. They suggested that their efforts might be best achieved within the Board's structure rather than without.

These professional reformers had faith in both their ideas and the educational establishment and felt strongly that fragmentation of efforts led nowhere. They were committed to centralization, bureaucratic centralization, as the sole legitimate means for obtaining social change. They believed, in the classic liberal tradition, that the bureaucracy's emphasis on merit, protected against special interests and favoritism and insured objectivity. Considering the sensitivity of the problems they were dealing with, they quickly sought the shelter of the Board. Indeed it must be admitted that this shelter--this centralization, had produced substantial benefits--a city-wide tax base, and, an, as near as possible, nonpolitical school administration--but it also entailed serious sacrifices in terms of account-

ability.[2] That the committee would subsequently find out.

At the outset, John Wade, Superintendent of Schools, reacted favorably to the idea in the spring of 1944. The Board would set up its own committee. The structure of the committee and its chairman were discussed by Wade, board members and lay individuals in the latter part of September 1944. Wade decided on the organization of the committee and subsequently announced its formation officially. The Advisory Committee on Human Relations came into being then in late September 1944. It consisted of 15 representatives of school and civic organizations who would assist the Board in "evaluating the work on tolerance done in the schools, suggest new areas for study or exploration and coordinate the school program with that of the community."[3]

At the same time Superintendent Wade appointed Frank Karelson, Jr. as the chairman of this new Advisory Committee. Karelson, prominent, wealthy, an attorney, was a member of the Jewish intellectual elite circles, indeed a Mayflower in the broad context of the term, in New York. In addition, his credentials in education were noteworthy for he was a vice-president of the Public Education Association and president of the City-Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem,

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2. MarilynGittell and Maurice R. Berube, "In Whose Interest is the Public Interest," Social Policy (May/June, 1970), pp. 5-9.

3. New York Times, October 3, 1944.

a group of civic-minded New Yorkers interested in improving the plight of the Negro in the urban ghetto.

Among the groups represented were the Jewish Teachers Association, the Protestant Teachers Association, the Catholic Teachers Association, the New York Urban League, the NAACP, the Conference of Assistant Superintendents, the American Jewish Committee, the Brooklyn Committee for Racial and Religious Amity and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The Bureau of Intercultural Education and other school personnel were included. Although the committee members met often during the ensuing months, little was produced. There were no reports or statements publicly issued from the Committee directly or through the Board, for the Board had emphasized to the committee members that all written communications to the public on their findings had to be cleared with the Board's hierarchy. Although the chairman of the committee stated that papers were funnelled from his groups to the appropriate Board people, nothing was funnelled out for public consumption.

"Student Strikes Flare Into Riots In Harlem Schools."[4] "Knives Flash in Street Fights as Elders Join Pupils in Battling the Police."[5] Open racial warfare had broken out. The scene was Benjamin Franklin High School and its

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4. New York Times, September 29, 1945.

5. Ibid.

neighboring junior high school, James Otis.

200 police were immediately dispatched to "trouble spot" schools in ghetto areas of the city. The President of the Board of Education was seen entering City Hall.[6] Meanwhile, the principal of Franklin High School decried the publicity, saying the episode was "merely a boy's fight and not a real race issue."[7]

This was the mayor's town though. He wasn't about to take any chances. He didn't care what his past experiences in education had been, this was an emergency that required mayoralty interference. He called in the Police Department and instructed them to send daily reports directly to him. Official papers suggest that indeed the principal was wrong. Students were having more than a friendly squabble, for over 100 students were involved at the Franklin riot; knives, wood guns with cartridges in their chambers, razor blades and baling hooks were seized. Injuries were suffered by some boys. The custodian of the school was hurt when he tried to intervene. The police further reported that nine boys were being investigated while six already had been arrested.[8]

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6. Daily Mirror, September 30, 1945.

7. Ibid.

8. Report to F. H. LaGuardia from Acting Capt. Schrieber, Bureau of Operations, New York City Police Department (September 28, 1945), (Private Papers of Mayor F. H. LaGuardia Administration located at New York City Municipal Archives Center).

Reports by the Police further substantiated the newspapers' claim: juvenile delinquency had increased, drop-outs had increased, the schools were indeed tinderboxes.[9]

The Teachers Union of the CIO and the New York Teachers Guild of the AFL, issued statements calling for prompt action by city officials to correct this situation. The Teachers Union statement charged that at Benjamin Franklin resentment had increased greatly because of the number of Negro students entering the school. They also charged little or nothing had been done to work out satisfactory race relations in the neighborhood. Several years ago, in the school itself, the Teachers Union said, "an abortive attempt was made to introduce an intercultural and interracial program. But for a long time it has been only sporadic and has depended upon the initiative of a few individual teachers."[10] The Teachers Guild said the outbreak sprang from deepseated social conditions and called for the Board of Education to provide a program for social harmony in the schools. They went on further to say: "These outbreaks bear grim testimony to the failure of the Board of Education to provide a program for racial harmony in the schools. There has been much talk among school officials about a real program of

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9. Brooklyn Eagle, October 1, 1945.

10. P.M., October 1, 1945.

cooperation among races and religions. But there has been little action."[11]

The response by the city and Board was to set up a five-way investigation to determine whether professional agitators were at the bottom of these racial disturbances which flarred at Franklin. Conducting investigations were the District Attorney's office, the Police Department, the NAACP, the Board of Education and the City-Wide Committee on Harlem.[12]

A newspaper account sets out the experiences and views of some of the investigators during their study. Its first sentences set the tone for the entire article: "an inquiry into the situation reveals a shocking state of flabby routinism and inertia far beyond the confines of the East Harlem area. It uncovers an appalling failure of our public school system...to cope with a vital problem of human relations that admittedly should be an essential concern of our school authorities."[13]

It goes on to enumerate other problems, such as increased teen-age hoodlumism, high racial tension, especially

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11. New York Post, October 1, 1945.
12. World Telegram, October 2, 1945.
13. "City School Bureaucracy Fails on Racial Problems," P.M., October 16, 1945.

in East Harlem. "It is tragic that the city has no coordinated plan for coping with this serious problem through the schools and other agencies. It is most significant that the school officials themselves never displayed any leadership in promoting inter-cultural harmony...."[14] The news article stated further that the city Board of Education had on paper an intercultural relations program but when teachers were asked about implementation, they said they either "never heard of it (the program)" or asked "what...program."[15]

If only those professional reformers knew in 1943 what a writer was to verbalize two years later: "While giving lip-service to the ideas of school and community cooperation our educational authorities from Dr. John Wade down have repeatedly resisted efforts of civic agencies to formulate common action programs in inter-cultural relations. They look upon the schools as a 'closed system' under their exclusive jurisdiction. Public interest in school program is often resented as an effort by intruders to muscle into their territory."[16] But were they intruders? They had asked that the work be done on the school's territory with the school's own people? Reformers were reformers though, they were not bureaucrats, and whether they operated from Board headquarters

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14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. P.M., October 16, 1945.

or a civic group address, they were different. Perhaps that's why their reports and releases never were funnelled out to the public.

These then were the preliminary events--the racial conflicts, the investigations, the public indignation, the Board's closeness and bureaucratic elitism--leading up to Frank Karelson's public resignation as chairman of the Advisory Committee on Human Relations, and the on-set of the crisis.

On October 17, 1945, Frank Karelson sent a press release to the newspapers announcing his reasons for resigning as chairman of the Board's Advisory Committee on Human Relations. His main reason, he stated, was the lack of co-operation from the Board, the Superintendent of Schools and the mayor. His Committee's reports and recommendations were ignored, press releases quashed and their work generally thwarted.[17] Concomitant with these basic faults Karelson sought "to call attention to the conditions responsible for the low morale of the supervisory staff, teachers and students in our public schools: tensions between Negroes and whites and between racial, religious and other groups, classes without teachers, misuse of substitutes, lack of attendance

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17. Letter from Frank Karelson to Superintendent of Schools John Wade, October 17, 1945 (Private Papers of F. H. LaGuardia Administration).

officers with consequent gangsterism among truants and other dire conditions."[18] In publicly censuring the Board, he stated that he hoped needed action to "turn chaos into order" would come from the mayor, the Board itself and if need be the Governor and State Board of Regents.[19]

To buttress his pleas, 20 members of his Advisory Committee resigned the following day. One member, a Dr. Ernest Osborne, claimed the organization was merely a "front" for the Board[20] while another member, Helen Trager, was more verbose: "On the one hand it (the Advisory Committee) serves as a protective coloration in defending the school system against those who charge it with a 'do nothing' policy and on the other hand it, in fact, permits the school system to do nothing."[21]

Various groups in the city responded quickly, for this was a situation that brought to a head certain basic issues: whether the quality of education existing in the schools was satisfactory; whether racial and cultural tensions could be reduced by educational programs and policies; and whether the relationship of the Board of Education with the Advisory Committee on Human Relations was beneficial to

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18. New York Times, October 18, 1945.
19. Letter from Frank Karelson, op. cit.
20. New York Times, October 19, 1945.
21. P.M., October 18, 1945.

either the Board, the Committee or the community -- whether, in fact, professional reformers could seek change through the centralized education mechanism.

Quality of education always has been questioned by the citizenry--whether it be indirect by assessing the adequacy of basic skills in the marketplace or by measuring the degree of civic participation and leadership exercised by the young. Direct questioning takes place annually at budget time when allocations for education are usually debated at City Hall by school members, the mayor and the public. In addition, local and state politicians often seize upon the question of quality education and build their careers on hearings and investigations that uncover failings in school programs, policies and the like. Suffice it to say, that a discussion of educational quality is a favorite pasttime of the citizenry and legislators alike. However, it took on added color then because of the unusual tensions in the city. World War II sensitized the public tremendously to cultural and religious discrimination. Further, the out-migration of Negroes from the South to the urban areas of the Northeast during the 1940's created added tensions in various aspects of city life, primarily in the schools.[22] Although integration and de-

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22. The Social and Economic Statistics of Negroes in the United States, No. 375 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics, 1969), p. 5.

centralization efforts have been commonplace in New York since at least the late 1950-1960's, it was at this time more of a special issue that the school authorities and the city had to face. Whether outbreaks of violence could be controlled in schools depended on many factors, one, of course, being new programs and activities to encourage understanding of various cultures.

The question of communication and support between the Advisory Committee and the Board was an issue that was highly particularized. Most advisory committees performed in a state of limbo and never got very far in lodging criticisms, for the Board's structure and operations had usually fallen under the protective cloak of the education-sans-politics myth and rarely then had any advisory committee, through its chairman, exercised such a strong critical position that involved so many political and educational figures as Karelson's.

When interest, civic and teacher groups responded, their positions overwhelmingly supported the protagonist. The Teacher's Guild stated it had criticized the Board for similar failings and made recommendations for improvements but no action had ever been taken. They congratulated Karelson for taking firm action. The Teacher's Union agreed. The United Parents Association (UPA) headed by Rose Shapiro (later to become a Board member and its president) registered distress

over the situation initially and later withdrew UPA's representative from the Committee.[23] The Public Education Association (PEA) applauded its vice-president's action and urged the Board of Regents to conduct an investigation of the city schools because of the "low ebb of public confidence (in the schools)."[24]

The political element was introduced by Assemblyman Schuper (D-Bklyn) who announced that he "would demand a state investigation of the school board when the Albany session opened in January." Stanley Isaacs, highly regarded, long-term Manhattan Councilman, called for a "thorough overhauling of the system."

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in her news column supported Karelson by stating:

> Mr. Karelson is a man who understands that patience is needed in bringing about reforms, and so, if after his long experience in connection with education generally, he has decided that it is necessary to resign in order to focus the attention of people on the situation in our New York City schools, we may rest assured that the situation is truthfully reported. Mr. Karelson is a lawyer and knows that an assertion must be backed by evidence....[25]

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23. New York Times, October 26, 1945.

24. Public Education Association Release (undated) (Private Papers of F. H. LaGuardia Administration).

25. World Telegram, October 19, 1945.

The public too generally responded enthusiastically to Karelson's charges. Letters written to LaGuardia at the time seem to sum up the feeling. Willard Johnson of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and a group represented on the Committee, wrote the mayor in November of 1945 imploring him to bring the situation into focus: "... give the public the facts and show that you are concerned about the school children of the city."[26]

Karelson knew that professional reformation was not the answer to improving the educational picture in New York City. He would have to operate outside the educational establishment if he were to be effective at all. Thus he ushered in a whole new aspect of reform in education--years later it would be called participation reform.[27]

Participation reformers contend that when a bureaucratic system has become paralyzed, when it no longer is able to be responsible to the community, it has failed structurally, becoming regimented and rigid through a system closed to the outside environment. Power is exerted and manipulated solely by the professionals. An elite develops and controls. When this failure occurs, participation reformers stress that a redistribution of power is essential. In the redistribution procedure, the system must

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26. Letter from Willard Johnson to F. H. LaGuardia, November 2, 1945 (Private Papers of F.H. LaGuardia Administration).

27. Gittell and Berube, op. cit., pp. 5-9.

be opened to the outside environment, insuring a new source of energy as the basis of institutional reform. In fact, they see this new source of energy as a major force for change. However, this type of reform--where redistribution of economic, social or political power to groups not formerly participating in policy-making takes place--implies upheaval, crisis, controversy. It can be manifested in the loss of confidence and ouster of the professionals, or public censure, or confrontation.[28]

Karelson's new source of energy then would be an Emergency Committee for Better Schools for New York's Children, comprised of a number of the resigned committee members and other community and civic leaders, some 30 in all.

The ad hoc committee immediately held press conferences, having teachers in various city public schools attest to the chaotic conditions of the schools. The group kept their story daily on the front pages of the major newspapers and its chairman, Frank Karelson, after hearing testimony from numerous individuals called for Superintendent Wade's resignation and for the resignation of bureaucrats who were responsible for maintaining the poor school conditions.[29]

The emergency committee went on the record to

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28. Ibid.

29. New York Times, October 20, 1945.

demand not only a quick resolution of the situation but charged the candidates in the current mayoralty election with the task of answering to the electorate how they would "overhaul the (school) bureaucracy, how they would improve the membership of the Board of Education, how they would correct the abuses already revealed and how they would put the 14-point program of the Advisory Committee (complete teaching staff, smaller classes, adequately staffed attendance bureau, more clerical help, additional units of Bureau of Child Guidance, more all-day neighborhood schools, special attention in tension and underprivileged areas, et al.) into effect."[30]

Finally, Karelson publicly called on Governor Dewey to conduct an investigation claiming the State had the primary responsibility for seeing that "things are remedied and the system made sound."[31]

The Board was rather unmoved by the events, even though a new dimension of reform had been introduced.

Superintendent Wade's office issued only one communication during the first few days of the controversy. It merely acknowledged Karelson's resignation by appointing the Dean of Columbia University's Teachers College, William

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30. New York Post, October 20, 1945; P.M., October 20, 1945.
31. Herald Tribune, October 22, 1945.

F. Russell, to head the Committee. Realizing that the media had seized the situation, Wade later spoke out, stating that the Advisory Committee's charges were misleading because they had overstepped their powers and gone into areas that did not concern them. Wade further stated that in a letter to Frank Karelson, a few months after the inception of the Committee, he delineated the Committee's scope: "Bring me suggestions and advice as to how community agencies could be drawn into promoting and maintaining respect and good will and reducing differences...(T)he advisory committee could (further) aid in giving...suggestions on good racial programs which could be spread by these community agencies."[32] The Committee members claimed they never saw the letter to Karelson.

In formal answer to the Karelson charges, Wade authored a multi-paged report entitled "The State of the Schools." In this report he stated that "it is important to bear in mind that the school system of the City of New York has suffered from the same handicaps due to war conditions that have plagued the administration of all large organizations. Shortage of personnel, scarcity of materials, enforced cessation of building operations and all other concomitant handicaps of war."[33]

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32. Louis Yavner, Administration of Human Relations Program in New York City, Report to Hon. F. H. LaGuardia (New York: December 20, 1945), p. 22.

33. John E. Wade, State of the Schools, Report to the Board of Education (November 7, 1945), p. 2.

Wade then sought again to defend the schools generally by delivering a one-half hour prime-time radio broadcast entitled "The New York City Schools' Attack." He stated that "we school administrators are our own severest critics" and that "we are doing the best we can for your children."[34] He admitted that the schools had their problems but again claimed war conditions caused them and asked the public to "appraise what we have done...in the light of the great obstacles of the times."[35]

Ten days elapsed before the mayor entered the educational picture.

No official documents are available to suggest his reasons for late entry and one can only guess that either he felt the crisis would quickly die on the vine, or, because of his lame-duck status, felt he did not want to become involved once again with educators and be ineffective. The latter seems too unlike LaGuardia, given his dominant personality and his strong view of the mayoralty. Besides, as events unfolded it became obvious that he considered the mayoralty as the one participant that could seize the situation and end it.

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34. John E. Wade, The New York City Schools' Attack, Board of Education Press Release, November 17, 1945.

35. Ibid., p. 16.

When he actively became engaged in the crisis it was rather open and dramatic as suited his style. No insignificant press release or inconsequential aide would issue a City Hall statement.

His message centered on Frank Karelson, patronage and corruption in educational affairs. He claimed that in the 1930's, Commissioner of Investigation for New York City, one Wallstein, issued a report linking Frank Karelson and his law firm with a real estate operator named Horowitz who was sentenced to jail in connection with corrupt school site transactions. The mayor explained the practice by stating that the Karelson law firm set up "dummy corporations" to buy inexpensively real estate parcels that they knew through inside information the City was interested in purchasing for school sites, and then sold them to the City at inflated prices, thus making large sums of money.[36]

The mayor stated further that the current Karelson action was just "a political trick to get rich (again) by school sites.[37] In addition, he claimed "those well-meaning people who sided with Karelson are just playing into the hands of the politicians...."[38] He also questioned Karelson's authority in asking for Wade's resignation.

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36. New York Times, October 28, 1945 and October 29, 1945; Herald Tribune, October 28, 1945; Daily News, October 28, 1945.

37. New York Times, October 28, 1945.

38. Ibid.

He attacked Karelson publicly with the intention of discrediting personally and professionally the man who was trying to crumble his "heavenly city." Karelson, he knew, was a well-liked civic leader who had more than a superficial or passing interest in the field of education. For many years, he had been an active member of the prominent Public Education Association and had built up a coterie of supporters both inside and outside of the school system. In fact, it had been rumored that LaGuardia had offered, on two separate occasions, membership on the Board of Education to Karelson, who reportedly stated that acceptance would be contingent upon independence from mayoralty control.[39] Karelson never became a Board member. In addition, Karelson cut across the social and economic elites of the city, a wealthy Jew, a prosperous Park Avenue law practice, a member of the accepted establishment.

But, and the "but" is big, LaGuardia himself had tried with the Gary Plan and the Bureau of Supplies, specifically, to open up the system to new thought--to fire the imagination of its members. And he never succeeded. On the one hand, one queries why not let a Mayflower intercede? But on the other, one sees LaGuardia and his conception

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39. Herald Tribune, November 2, 1945.

of the mayoralty. It was the chief office of the city and if criticism were to be lodged, it would come from that office. For this was his city, "...he was the sole one responsible. He was what the people looked up to...he was the symbol...he was the city government while he was in office."[40] Indeed, LaGuardia had no established following or machine to mend his fences or secure ties with various groups in the city. He was the center of the wheel and had to create his own organization and be its sole operator. He had to protect his flanks from all usurpers.

> He was always criticized as being a dictator. That was something he couldn't help, because he was the party himself. He was elected. He was responsible, for everything. He had no Republican Party.... The liberal groups that were really backing him had no power, so that he was the one elected.[41]

He had no ready or steady allies. Party affiliation is very important in a city like New York. In a city which has one dominant party, you are either part of that party or you ally yourself with the minority and count on defectors, civic groups and third parties to support you. If you reject the dominant one, have luke-warm relations with the minority one, you have to create your own organization, become an

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40. The Reminiscences of Mrs. Marie LaGuardia, wife of F. H. LaGuardia (New York: Columbia University Oral Research Office, 1949), p. 56.

41. Ibid., p. 31.

astute wielder of influence and a master power player, especially when critics from the outside begin to attack the departments and commissions of your Administration. To abdicate any of these duties will usually spell doom. He was the mayor; education was under the province of city government; he was not going to let any "goo goo" type criticize it without a fight.[42]

The only way to solve this crisis quickly, would be to attack harshly the man making the statements. Furthermore, LaGuardia felt strongly about rooting out corruption and imagined that most New Yorkers felt the same way about someone putting his hand in the till. He used a traditional issue, corruption in school site purchase and construction, to assassinate Karelson.

Undoubtedly, he assumed the public would recognize that his disclosure of Karelson's indiscretions was his means of protecting the city from further corruption. This would quash the crisis.

LaGuardia directed his Commissioner of Investigation, Louis Yavner, to conduct a muckraking investigation of Karelson and his Advisory Committee and to issue a report as promptly as possible. This action was not extraordinary since the office of Commissioner of Investigation, although considered a legitimate and prestigious office by the

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42. Interview with Louis Yavner, op. cit.

citizenry, actually has as its chief function to provide a mayor with the information he wants for any given situation. In fact, some 25 years later, the Commissioner was to admit that that was exactly what he did and wrote a report that had little bearing on educational inadequacies but much on human inadequacies.[43]

Within two months of its assignment, Yavner submitted his report to the mayor and the press. The first page announced: "It is our considered judgment that a reading of (the) wealth of evidence leads to the inescapable conclusion that Mr. Karelson's charges are largely a series of demagogic phrases and political catchwords. Mr. Karelson succeeded in creating a minor public hysteria which resulted in stampeding 28 other members of the Advisory Committee into a mass resignation."[44]

It then went on to acknowledge an "irretrivable error" of the Board[45]--the selection and appointment of Frank Karelson as chairman of the Committee originally. It saw Karelson acting in a high-handed manner, adding members to the Committee, diluting the Board's strength and engaging in a "struggle for power" with Superintendent Wade.[46] It quoted the testimony of members that saw the meetings as ill-attended talk marathons and unfruitful discussions. One member was

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43. Ibid.
44. Yavner, Administration of Human Relations Program in New York City, op. cit., p. 1.
45. Ibid., p. 8.
46. Ibid.

quoted as seeing the Advisory Committee as "a lot of hogwash."[47] In addition, under a caption "Prejudice of the Unprejudiced" it claimed that the Committee was a study of human beings "all too human" meaning that the Committee was divided because of human biases, namely anti-Catholic feelings which were supposedly exhibited and fostered by Karelson. In fact, Yavner asserts a coup among members was about to take place to depose Karelson on the very day of his resignation.[48] Yavner stated that the very cultural pluralism philosophy that the Advisory Committee espoused could not be exercised among its members and thus fragmented the group and rendered it ineffective. Neither Superintendent Wade's actions nor conditions at the various schools were fully discussed in the report.

The Yavner investigation caused outcries from many quarters of the city.

Naturally, the first one to respond was Karelson. He was originally subpoenaed by Yavner to testify at closed hearings. He immediately refused, calling the investigation a LaGuardia conducted "gestapo-like" inquiry aimed at obscuring the deplorable conditions in the schools.[49] Second, he categorically denied the innuendoes made by the mayor concerning his law practice. He described LaGuardia's remarks as "verbal thuggery and character assassination"[50] and went

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47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 10
49. New York Times, October 29, 1945.
50. Interview with Frank Karelson, Chairman of the Committee on Human Relations, February 11 and 27, 1970.

on to say that the "mayor had desparately avoided any discussion of that subject (the state of the schools) or of his responsibility in it, and instead indulged in an attempt to assassinate my character. I refuse to permit the mayor to becloud and confound the issue."[51]

The newspapers rallied to Karelson's aid, along with many of the groups who supported his resignation. The New York Times made this observation: "It is interesting that when various responsible groups ask for an investigation by the mayor nothing happens but now, when he is under the gun, he's quick on the trigger."[52]

The evening daily, P.M., observed that numerous parents and teachers groups "have accused the mayor of sidestepping the major question of improving the city's schools and of seeking to divert criticism from himself in ordering the investigation."[53]

Teacher groups, by and large, played a limited role for their organization was fragmented because of battling factions, representing different religious affiliations and different labor groups. More time was spent in internal debates and controversies that little influence let alone power

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51. Herald Tribune, October 29, 1945.

52. New York Times, October 30, 1945.

53. P.M., October 30, 1945.

emerged from their ranks. As evidenced by their own statements, their criticisms of school conditions on prior occasions fell on deaf ears at the Board. They had no leverage as a distinct group to force the Board's hand in taking any action. If a powerful spokesman was pleading their cause, they certainly would support him and not his opponent.

Councilman Stanley Isaacs again entered the picture, "I know enough of conditions in the schools to be sure the criticism of the emergency committee are justified. That is what should be investigated, not Karelson's activities in the year 1930."[54] He called for public hearings conducted by the City Council.

Correspondence to the mayor reflected the public reaction: amazement at his conduct concerning the resignation of Frank Karelson, his stooping to character assassination and his not encouraging a full-scale investigation. Thus middle-class support was non-existent. LaGuardia had won the middle-class on a crusade plank in 1933 and on an American Labor Party slate in 1937 and 1941. But he didn't win them now. Both in politics generally, and education particularly, they were disillusioned and looking around for a new candidate. Since he had not been effective in the educational field, he offered them nothing. It was difficult

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54. Ibid.

for him to build up this constituency.

Karelson further seized the situation by calling on Governor Dewey to investigate the school situation. Dewey replied by turning over the request to William Wallin, Chairman of the Board of Regents, the responsible arm for such an investigation.[55] Wallin contacted Karelson asking for his charges against the school system and materials to substantiate them. Karelson gratified by the quick action, replied by delivering his 14-point program and other materials. The Board of Regents met in mid-November as a legal body and decided that the charges and materials submitted required a statement from the Board of Education and its Superintendent.[56] It also directed the State Commissioner of Education, Dr. George Stoddard, to determine after study of the Board of Education's report and Karelson's charges, whether a full-scale inquiry was necessary.

The Board never really refuted Karelson's charges. Their report acknowledged the fact that the school system lacked teachers because of the cumbersome procedures of the Board of Examiners, stated that teachers were needed in greater numbers and admitted that the Board had to "compete with private industry (because of their)...present rates of

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55. New York Post, October 24, 1945.

56. World Telegram, November 16, 1945.

pay."[57] The report also cited that progress was slow at the Board and acknowledged that a curriculum bulletin originated in a 1943 summer workshop still had not been printed.[58]

Their report, including the Wade Report, "State of the Schools," concluded:

> The challenge which presents itself to boards of education and to educators is to maintain a cooperative relationship with the community and to make continuous efforts to reconcile proposals for change with realistic conditions.[59]

The "challenge" was presented. The Regents could have demanded that the school system be opened to the community, that the Board's imagination be fired by reformers. But it didn't. It accepted the report as a pledge from them to straighten out their own house. As events unfolded, the war was over, peace returned, money became more fluid and conflict subsided. For awhile anyway.

The matter of challenging the merits of bureaucratic centralization would this die quietly in the wood-panelled austere Regent's Room in Albany. Karelson and his emergency committee would lose front-page newspaper attention and would work quietly to further achieve their objectives.

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57. Report to Chancellor William J. Wallin (New York: Board of Education, December 10, 1945), pp. 8, 16.

58. Ibid., p. 30.

59. Ibid., p. 43.

However, the matter of challenging the mayor was quite another story. The crisis was more complex, for it involved at least three different issues. Those issues were not merely ones that concerned the organization or structure of the Board, its closeness or elitism, but were issues that cut across the fabric of the city in its most sensitive areas--race, religion and cultural differences. As a result, no easy answer or solution was possible for LaGuardia. To commission a report of school programs would not satisfy the Karelson group who had by now built the crisis into proportions that demanded immediate action. To delve into the reasons for racial disturbances and perhaps point the finger at certain groups would be courting devastating results in a city as heterogeneous as New York. To remove the Superintendent of Schools was not part of a mayor's authority. To agree with Karelson was not part of LaGuardia conception of the mayoralty. Even though he as the mayor was not responsible for the Karelson committee's ineffectiveness, the nature and operation of the Board was; this was an attack from an outsider on his Administration. That was the point. It was not that he supported the Board, per se, but the Board of Education was part of his Administration. They couldn't be separated. Thus, the attack could not go unchallenged. The issue then could best be handled by ignoring its substance and focusing on the man creating the issue. Perhaps the spotlight would move too.

Thus, a frontal attack was launched at all the powers in the city supporting Karelson--parents, teachers, civic groups, prominent political individuals, the Governor and the Regents.[60] It was a rerun of LaGuardia' successful crusade platform of running the corrupt rascals out of the centers of power. It was then a solution that either would be won or lost completed. Either Karelson would lose prestige among his backers, thus losing the spotlight, thus not challenging the Board or the Administration, or Karelson would seize the situation, playing up anti-Semitic treatment, and walk away with the prize--making the educational establishment aecountable to him. It then was for LaGuardia a solution that was dangerous and not easily attainable, for Karelson was a highly regarded Mayflower remember, with a local following. The Yavner report, intending to help the mayor, was immediately upon publication criticized: "Its author wields a clumsy smear-brush with one hand and applies a heavy coat of whitewash with the other....It should not go unchallenged."[61] That was merely one account. It had no credibility among other groups either.

As events unfolded it became evident that LaGuardia had lost and Karelson had used the attack and report to

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60. Although neither the Governor nor the Regents took a direct stand i.e. outright support of Karelson or the Board, for politically they could not, the very fact that they moved so quickly and independently without consulting with either the Board or mayor, and accepting Karelson's charges and materials, is evidence of the fact they felt the New York City Board was not completely innocent.

61. P.M., December 30, 1945.

further his cause. Almost no one questioned Karelson's motives. No one highlighted what Karelson originally based his argument on--the role of the Advisory Committee vis-a-vis the Board. If it were to evaluate, assist and coordinate human relation programs for the school system in the community, as its original mandate was, then Karelson had a legitimate complaint in accusing the Board of non-cooperation, stalling and closedness. If, on the other hand, the Advisory Committee had only limited duties as defined by Wade later on, those of suggesting and advising, then Karelson was stepping out of bureaucratic line and engaging in a power stuggle. No one questioned whether Karelson was truly involved in corrupt legal or financial partices. No one cared. Certainly LaGuardia's correspondence with the citizenry bear that out. The surge for honesty and reform that ran so high in 1933 was no longer alive. The enemy here was the school system and that alone. LaGuardia, as mayor, certainly had the authority to enter into the situation and a reading of letters addressed to him seemed to plead for his interference. Undoubtedly, LaGuardia felt that he, as mayor, somehow had enough public support and did not have to yield any influence, that his power was large and wide-spread enough to command a following. His private papers reflect no written or telephone conversations with Board members or civic groups at this time to discover who could be expected to support him or how they felt the

crisis was developing. His educational liaison, Trude Weil, received no written directives or suggestions for mobilizing resources to support his solutions. This absence is particularly noteworthy for memoranda abound between Weil and LaGuardia on other controversial educational issues.

Karelson in gaining power and influence put the Board and Superintendent Wade on the defensive. They were forced to defend their activities and programs. In writing their report, the Board, through its president, admitted certain inadequacies and pledged to correct them.

Karelson, had, for all intent and purposes, defeated the mayor, not only in the particular instance but in education generally, for where the mayor was usually rebuffed and had to retreat, Karelson had made the Board retreat. Although it is not to be suggested here that the Board's retreat ended with a glowing new and energetic human relations program for city schools, or an acceptance of either professional or participation reformers, or a healthy open bureaucratic structure, it made the Board admit that the education establishment could be openly challenged and held accountable. That was a victory in 1945.

That was something LaGuardia had never been able to accomplish in the field of education. Thus he was over-

shadowed not only by a Board of Education but by a Mayflower.

CHAPTER IV

ROBERT F. WAGNER - THE MAN

> Don't antagonize them, they're all voters.
>
> Senator Robert F. Wagner

If ever one were schooled from infancy for his future role in society, it was Robert Wagner. His life reads like a tome on how to win political friends and influence voters.

Political life was the sacred mission. It wasn't merely a pasttime one daubled in, or a game one indulged in. It was to be a serious profession, a position earned only after meeting all the requirements and prerequisites. Thus one needed teachers, books, experiences and big-picture views of how it all worked and what it all meant. The goals were, of course, prestige and power, but hopefully they went beyond that--to make life a bit easier for the average man.

To achieve this end, Robert Wagner conveniently was born into a political household, for in 1910 his father was deeply involved in New York politics, being a Democratic

State Senator and a strong Tammany Hall supporter. Senator Wagner had achieved this position through hard work and many mistakes. He, like most parents, believed he could make it easier for his son, for he would teach him the holes to sidestep and the boulevards to glide on. It would be a long initiation period but an exciting and eventful one, for Senator Wagner saw the political world as the most adventuresome and fascinating world to live in. His excitement with politics began as a young, eager, bright immigrant in Yorkville in the late 1890s. It was a haven for newly-arrived Germans. His father was a janitor of a huge, dark and depressing tenement with little prospect of emerging into the light. The Irish in the area were the affluent ones--smoking aromatic tobacco and eating juicy steaks. Wagner realized the route from the tenement to the restaurant and those steaks lay not in working more diligently as a janitor but in emulating the Irish, learn to speak the language and use it to get a political job.[1] In addition to learning the language, a German would need something else, something valuable to enter the Irish-dominated Tammany doors. Those were the only doors that counted, for New York was a Democratic town.

Those doors, however, were guarded closely against any intruder for the Irish had waited a long time to gain

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1. New York Post, January 18, 1956.

control. During most of the 19th century, especially the 1830s and 1840s when they had arrived in large numbers, gaining a foothold in New York City politics was an impossibility. In fact, they were bitter opponents of Tammany Hall, considering it a home of bigotry and prejudice because of its policy of accepting only natural borns rather than "adopted citizens" among its ranks.[2] It was only after Tammany was forced to recruit naturalized citizens in order to maintain its power position in the city that the Irish began to infiltrate. They ascended those political steps slowly, starting at precinct levels and working up to district leader and assembly leader. It took them another 50 years to control three counties, Manhattan, Queens and Kings,[3] and thus capture Tammany. As Lowi has pointed out, "representation of a new minority in places of power occurs long after it has reached considerable size in the population and electorate"[4] but for the Irish the wait was the longest of most groups--almost a century. Thus, at the turn of the century, political power in New York was held tightly by the Irish. They had waited but now had control--no one was going to wrest it from them.

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2. Gustavus Myers, The History of Tammany Hall (New York: Boni & Liveright, Inc., 1917), p. 30.

3. Lowi, At the Pleasure of the Mayor, op. cit., pp. 37, 40.

4. Ibid., p. 39.

Wagner decided that the valuable asset that might open those doors would be higher education, something the Irish neglected to obtain. With the aid of his family he attended the college of similarly-situated immigrants, The City College of New York, and with the help of a good brain and strong discipline, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a Bachelor of Science degree. During this time he held various parttime jobs, enjoying most perhaps his bellhopping days at the New York Athletic Club,[5] the haven of the prosperous Irish. Those prosperous Irish were more often than not, Tammany influentials. Wagner got to know many of them. He listened closely to their tales, their exploits, their strategies. His practical education in politics meshed nicely with his academic training. After receiving his LL.B. at New York Law School, he started his political career in earnest. It began on the district level, frequenting the neighborhood Tammany clubs, getting well known, doing favors, building political fences. Before long he was an Assemblyman from Yorkville, the 16th A.D. in Manhattan to be exact. He then ascended to the State Senate, becoming its Democratic floor leader, and then successively robed himself in the

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5. John C. O'Brien, "Robert F. Wagner: Pilot of the New Deal," ed. John T. Salter, The American Politician (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938), pp. 114-15.

black mantle of the New York State Supreme Court and the New York State Appellate Division. His final triumph was as New York State's Senator to Washington. That triumph repeated itself for three consecutive terms.[6]

In the course of his political travels he met many, becoming the close and intimate friend of both Governor Al Smith, a presidential hopeful, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the hopeful president. His experiences molded a man interested in improving social conditions for the less fortunate. He often gave reason for his dogged support of social legislation by recalling his early Yorkville days. "My boyhood was a pretty rough passage. It left its marks and when I found myself in a position to influence legislation, the thought of the social injustices I had seen all around me and still see all around me impelled me to work for the passage of every measure that I thought would ameliorate such conditions."[7] The rhetoric was glowing and hopefully assuaged any feelings among both his supporters and voters that there was any ambiguity between supporting avant-garde social legislation, while staunchly supporting Tammany--that tiger that more often than not took more from the little man than it ever gave. Wagner was a politician, he needed a base for operation if he were to unfold his plans and realize his goals. It was all

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6. Robert F. Wagner, Sr. Scrapbook (New York: Municipal Reference and Research Library, 1964) (pages unnumbered)

7. John C. O'Brien, op. cit., p. 112.

very practical and he couldn't understand why others saw him as enigmatic.

His practical view of things made him a Senate success--success as defined by his peers that is, not by turning out legislation quickly and effortlessly but by plodding methodically along. At the end his bills usually became law. Illustrative of his plodding nature is the history of the social security bill. He started pressing for unemployment insurance in his first term, 1926, and kept presenting revised bills each session, until the social security bill was passed in 1936. Ten years taught him to be a realist, one who would compromise, one who would take half a loaf if he couldn't get the whole loaf. He realized too that getting even half a loaf required adroit negotiation and persuasiveness, not through colorful oratory on the Senate floor but through cloak-room encounters.[8] His style was first legalistic--argue the merits of the case plainly and squarely. He would then inject political elements and wait out the results. Waiting was, of course, something that sometimes couldn't be hurried, but learning those other things, negotiation, persuasion and the art of compromise, could be and Senator Wagner was intent on teaching them to his young son.

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8. Ibid., p. 114.

Robert Wagner's early life, then, would be one practical political lesson after another. It started first with the selection of his godfather, a strong influential Tammany District Leader, named Mike Cosgrove.[9] The concentration of those lessons increased at about age 9. His mother died and being any only child he became the permanent side-kick of his father. He travelled everywhere with him, being a page at the State Legislature, attending political meetings, rallies, conventions, poker games and the like.[10] Only occasionally did he get to enjoy things of childhood - riding a pony at Al Smith's home, or rough-housing with children his own age, or just acting childishly silly. By the time he was a young man, he had travelled to Europe, saw dozens of plays, heard many operas, rode in chauffeur-driven limousines, socialized with governors and presidents.

Robert Wagner's life was then quite different from that of most young boys and certainly radically different from that poor immigrant boy who went to City College, his father. But that was just the way Senator Wagner wanted it. Along with exposure to those cultural and political pursuits of New York and Albany and, later Washington, young Robert was exposed to an Ivy League education. He attended both public and Catholic elementary school and then prepped at Connecticut's Taft School before spending four years at Yale University, a

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9. Time, October 1, 1956.

10. New York Post, January 18, 1956.

year at Harvard's Business School, three at Yale's Law School and a summer at the Geneva School of International Relations. His studies primed him for his future governmental positions - political science, economics and international relations. He was active in Yale's Democratic Club, learning early how to harangue voters for F.D.R. on New Haven street corners, to assess prospective voter attitudes and behaviors and to argue domestic and international issues. LaCrosse also played a major role in his sports life for the ability to play a rugged game, to learn how to win it or how to suffer defeat, was essential if one were to play in one of the most rugged human games--election politics.

His father then cut the pattern of the future for his son; a young man, with correct education credentials, the ability to stand squarely and disciplined on a platform and debate his adversaries, a sophisticated, learned man at ease with the city's elites. He would be a new type of public official, not the Tammany hack, but an Ivy League, collegiate man, one that would listen, contemplate and then act.[11] He was, though, never to forget one very human factor--that all people were voters and nothing in his style or mien should alienate those voters. That would be the most important lesson to remember, for without that, all the rest would be folly.

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11. New York Times, October 17, 1953.

He began to exercise this education even before completing his law studies, for he was involved first-hand in his own political campaign for the State Assembly. The Yorkville Tammany Club had circulated petitions in 1936 calling for his nomination. The 16th A.D., the district his father used to initiate his political career, was to be ironically his first challenge. It wasn't in fact though much of a challenge for without any effort at all, while still at Yale taking his final year law examinations, he secured the nomination and then easily won the campaign in November. Later on in his political career he acknowledged that "I don't kid myself that the reason I had the opportunity to represent the district my father represented was the fact that he was there first and that I lived there all my life. Sure, my father helped me get started in politics...."[12] Although getting the Assembly seat did not require him to lean very heavily on the political education he had been schooled in since birth, he began to exercise it in the Assembly. Following his father's philosophy of social reform legislation he fought hard for a compulsory health bill and a public housing bill. Both were enacted into law quickly.[13] He studied, he knew the facts, he knew the political pressure

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12. New York Times, October 18, 1953.

13. Robert F. Wagner, Jr., Scrapbook (Vol. I; New York: Municipal Reference and Research Library, 1964), (pages unnumbered).

points, he compromised, he sat, he listened, he was respectful to the elder members. He waited and then won.

World War II interrupted his legislative career but only temporarily. He served in Europe, participating particularly in the Normandy invasion and emerged as a Lieutenant Colonel. In 1945, great honor was attributed to military service, with its titles and other regalia. It was most definitely another political asset for Wagner. He returned to Albany, served out his term, but by then was ready to move on and at the invitation of New York City's Democratic mayor, William O'Dwyer, became the new city Tax Commissioner. Within the year, he moved up to Commissioner of Housing and Buildings and then became Chairman of the City Planning Commission. He seemed to enjoy this office for it gave him a chance to see how his housing legislation was being implemented and to share in the future planning of the city. Although his employees considered him "brusque and stand-offish"[14] he managed to keep the department operating efficiently, free from scandal or corruption. There were no outstanding incidents or achievements or successes during his one and a half years at the helm, but that was understandable. Wagner's style as developed by an astute father, was emerging--handle the job, no matter what it was, capably but without fanfare. Don't get into trouble, don't interfere in areas where you

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14. New York Sun, January 3, 1948.

have limited authority. And most of all don't make rash decisions. He was taught that cautiousness was a virtue, never a vice. As he later was to say: "My father taught me a great deal. He never made snap judgments. He would think things through. He felt there were few issues that had to be decided on the spur of the moment even though people insisted that an immediate decision was vital. He believed it was wiser to sleep on it, to get some perspective. I have found the same to be true...."[15]

When Tammany mentioned the Manhattan Borough Presidency to Wagner in 1949, he didn't have to sleep too long on it - it was an elective office, one where he could assess his vote-getting strength again. He had really little to lose for traditionally Manhattan had been a Democratic stronghold and with Tammany backing he was sure to win. He campaigned actively for the post, advancing a low-keyed rhetoric with a good solid background in the ins-and-outs of city government. Housing was an issue that he could deal with easily having the Department of Housing and Buildings under his belt along with the knowledge of how the City Planning Commission operated. Education was an area that he had little experience in, but he did know that it was an issue dear to the hearts of all classes in Manhattan and he

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15. P. Hamburger, "The Mayor--Don't Honk, Bobby...the Man is a Voter," The New Yorker (February 2, 1957), p. 46.

would listen to their plights and be interested. The voters made their voices heard in that election, giving Wagner a 200,000 vote plurality over his opponent.[16]

During his four year tenure as Borough President, Wagner achieved one of the important necessities of politics: build up a strong base of support, make it as heterogeneous as possible. He achieved this primarily through two avenues.

His service in various departments in New York City government during the O'Dwyer years taught him that the administrative agencies were being overwhelmed with responsibilities for providing multiple city services and with complaints from the citizenry that these duties were not being met satisfactorily. As a result, the city was ceasing to function effectively. Wagner realized there was a void in the political structure of the city. Prior to the 1940's the local political clubs, primarily Tammany, acted as a buffer agent, a source of information and a mediator between the local districts and the city government. The district leaders knew who to go to in the city agencies to gain favors or services for their constituencies and knew, in turn; who to go to to cool down local resentment when demands were unmet. It was relatively easy for the Party to secure these favors for many of their people, Party people, were strategically located in the city's departments. But as the city grew more complex and civil

16. New York Times, July 17, 1956.

service reforms took shape, one particular change was readily evident--party control decreased as merit and fitness became the criteria for appointments and promotions in government service.[17] The meritocracy that subsequently developed in these municipal departments began to exercise their own political power at City Hall and Albany, and usually it was diametrically opposed to the Party's needs or desires. The local clubs thus could no longer handle the constituency's problems. Because they couldn't produce, their function and hence their value was depleted. On the other hand, the city bureaucracies were concerned primarily with their own interests. Something was needed.

Back in 1947 when Wagner was with the Housing Department he remembered the Citizens Union's proposal that New York City be divided into districts "for more orderly planning and decentralization of municipal services and community development.[18] The report went on to recommend the grouping of city services in one location in each district, with each district developing its own special plan in cooperation with the City Planning Commission. Three years later, the City Planning Commission seized the idea and proposed 66 districts as "logical units for the planning

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17. Lowi, At the Pleasure of the Mayor, op. cit., pp. 92, 220.

18. Daniel Bell and Virginia Held, "The Community Revolution," The Public Interest, No. 16 (Summer, 1969), p. 148.

of schools, housing, hospitals, libraries, playgrounds, local street systems, and other public facilities as well as for consideration of land use and zoning patterns."[19] Although much discussion was generated from this plan, little in practical results developed.

Wagner in 1951 decided to use the idea in Manhattan and as Borough President set up community planning councils, consisting of 15 to 21 appointed members, for each district in Manhattan. These boards were to dicuss a broad range of subjects, from zoning variances to school and library facilities. Problems that beset districts were intelligently discussed, experts from city agencies reviewed the departments' functions and activities and lobbying tactics were developed. Although these boards had little formal powers for they couldn't enact or change laws, they acted as a safety value for the community, mediating between and among the borough president's office and the city agencies and departments. The idea of decentralization and local community organizations as a source of participation in the new structure of urban government thus seemed to get its initial start here, in the early 1950s under Wagner's tutelage.[20] Manhattanites reacted warmly to these councils, and although their achievements were limited, they set the

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19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

tone of the Wagner borough presidency - he was interested and concerned and tried to give each citizen a chance to participate in his government.[21]

His interest and concern was further emphasized as a Board of Estimate member.

It should be pointed out that the Board of Estimate represents, in New York City's governmental structure, the upper house of the Legislature. Created in 1937, it comprises the mayor, the comptroller, the president of the City Council and the presidents of the city's five boroughs. It represents the top echelon of the city's official elected leaders. Thus it has had, at least prior to the 1961 charter revision, a great deal of influence in checking the mayor's activities, in delaying proposals that come in from all sources of city life. Its most important power has been control over the budget. Because of its power to alter the expense budget of the mayor during the fiscal year, it could in effect, and did often, remake the budget to suit its own wishes and interests. Thus as far as city power politics was concerned, the Board was courted by a vast network of those seeking favors, consideration and budgetary allocations. It held the power.

As a member of this powerful Board, Wagner found

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21. Interview with Henry Stern, liaison with Manhattan community planning boards in 1950s, Office of the Mayor, July 20, 1970.

it valuable to attend most sessions. He always seemed to be attentive to a spokesman on a given issue and unlike many of his colleagues, he was never involved in ready huge bills, or budgets or briefing memoranda while the session was open but sat wide-eyed through hours and hours of testimony. It is also noteworthy that while mayor he also continued this practice and seemed to have a ready answer or promised one when addressed. Perhaps his feeling was that the Board hearings offered an invaluable opportunity for a politician to learn where the grass roots stood on controversial issues, for much of the testimony involved the general citizenry complaining of problems and seeking solutions. No analysis, or memo or report by any young neophyte assistant could adequately present the cross-section of views that one was able to cull from these meetings. It was perhaps his way of walking the streets in shirtsleeves - gaining political knowledge, gaining exposure and hopefully gaining voter support.

By helping a distressed citizen, he could learn something about the functioning of a city department and hopefully improve the situation of the citizen. He could also gain a vote. It was another political lesson of his father's actualized: take an interest, show your face, write a letter.[22]

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22. E. W. Kentworthy, "The Emergence of Mayor Wagner," New York Times Magazine (August 14, 1955), pp. 20-34.

As time went on, it seemed many of his letters were directed to the Board of Education at 110 Livingston Street, for many of the citizenry's complaints focused on the plight of the city schools - either they were over-crowded, or poorly maintained, or understaffed, or the scene of discipline problems. Parent groups and individuals never seemed to reach into the labyrinth of Board headquarters to address their complaints to the right department. Wagner cultivated these groups, whether they be Manhattan residents or Staten Islanders. He would take an interest, write a letter and often visit the school, or the library, or the playground. Some results were usually forthcoming and the citizen felt contented, and remembered Wagner. He developed these contacts.

By 1953 he had built up a following. It included both Tammany and the individual voter. It was a mayoralty election year and the incumbent, Vincent Impelliteri, an Independent with little Democratic support, was a weak candidate. Tammany wanted to attach itself to a winner. It needed a man who was a proven vote-getter, a respected politician, one who was not touched with scandals or corruption or bribes, who had in effect stayed out of trouble and in New York City politics that ruled out a tremendous number of candidates. But Wagner's record, while not very colorful, was certainly quite clean. Carmine DeSapio, Tammany's leader, had contended with the scandals of the O'Dwyer years, the subsequent defeat of its organization by Impelliteri in 1949

on an Independent slate, and the loss of the City Council presidency in 1951. He now had to have a winning candidate. Thus under the direction of DeSapio, Wagner won the full support of the Party, campaigned against Republican, Liberal/ Independent and American Labor candidates. His election plank was "to listen, to assess and to give real leadership."[23]

He won smashingly, capturing more than one million votes, carrying four of the five boroughs of the city. He won so well because he had cultivated the voter every opportunity he got. As one campaign aide remarked after the election: "...we had a precinct organization built on the interest of parents in schools, hell, we could have won on the PTA vote."[24] All Newbold Morris could retort was "Wagner has set back the cause of Fusion for years."[25]

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23. New York Times, October 17, 1953.

24. Kentworthy, op. cit.

25. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

ROBERT F. WAGNER - THE MAYOR

> Politics is the science of doing what is possible.
>
> Robert F. Wagner, Jr.
> Second Mayoral Inaugural Address

Wagner's philosophy of governance followed closely such a definition. He wasn't about to be a crusader for utopian governments or pie-in-the-sky ideas. He saw the role of a mayor as that of a manager, one who operated on two different levels, to solve the problems of the city. He never initiated the problems nor did he seek direct confrontation with adversaries.

Wagner's first level approach to problem-solving was that of the open-mediator. He saw the mayor as the protector or guardian of the city's interests, an elected official responsible and answerable to the people.[1] It meant vocalizing publicly his interest in, and desire to help resolve, conflicts as they erupted. However, he never sat center-stage on this level. The responsible department heads and commissioners did, for they were the ones

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1. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, "Address to World Conference of Local Governments," June 15, 1961.

running the city's offices and departments. Wagner, depending on these men, thus would seek out and select high calibre experts for these posts, going beyond the usual political hacks of the clubhouses. It meant bringing in people like Stephen Kennedy, a crime expert, as Police Commissioner and Frederick Zurmublem, an authority on municipal construction, as Public Works Commissioner. These men thus would handle most decision-making duties of their respective departments but would report quickly and directly to Wagner when serious problems arose. Wagner would then take an official stance and set about directly and openly to bring all participants in the controversy together for negotiations. Newspaper coverage would be widespread, discussions open and the public apprised of developments. Solutions were more often than not consensual with each group receiving some valuable accommodation. The office of mayor was a direct catalystic force.

Wagner's interpretation of such an approach went even further--it meant setting up an office to coordinate generally the affairs of the city, thus further delimiting the possibility of his being taken to task directly. As a result of the Management Survey Committee Report[2] he set up

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2. New York City Mayor's Committee on Management Survey of the City of New York--Modern Management for the City of New York (New York: 1953), see all of Volume I.

an office of city administrator as protective insurance. He named Luther Gulick, an expert in the field and a contributor of the management study, to head up the new office.

Wagner's appointments then immediately identified him as a mayor who was independent, "who was not waiting to get the word from the Hall"[3] when making top appointments. It should be pointed out though that Wagner, as a public officeholder, was not about to completely dissociate himself from his political colleagues or interfere with soundly established political customs. He needed a base for operation, just as his father did. Thus he greased the political machine by giving lower-level jobs and appointments to the politicos of the local club houses as rewards for getting out the vote.

As a result then of this approach to the urban mayoralty Wagner, although directly responsible to the electorate, left the responsibility of running departments and solving problems to his expert decision-makers and their bureaucrats. Direct interference became verboten. Only when situations of crisis dimension developed, or ceremonial duties were called for or political party questions erupted, did Wagner come to the forefront. When he did become actively

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3. New York Times, August 31, 1956.

involved with a problem he would then try to solve it in a consensual manner, bringing in as many people as possible to discuss the situation fully. He would make a decision only after all voices and opinions had been had. This consensual style was formalized in a cabinet structure for both weekly meetings and ad hoc sessions. For the former meetings, the participants were always the same--the deputy director, the budget director, the city administrator, the corporation counsel, the personnel director, his assistants and executive secretary. The city administrator would draw up and distribute in advance an agenda consisting of the major problems confronting the city that week.[4] These weekly meetings were not, however, to make policy decisions but to prepare the way for decisions of an administrative nature. Wagner had realized that many of the problems that were blown into crisis-proportions often were no more than ones of administration. If they could be handled frequently and quietly, he could reduce confrontations that would put one group against another, perhaps challenging his authority. Thus, for example, a question concerning the budgetary allocation for certain Board of Education programs would be a policy matter that would not be discussed at a weekly meeting but at an ad hoc meeting. Administrative matters, such as whether Seventh or Eighth Avenue should be a one-way street, or how to tackle juvenile delinquency problems or whether the Salk

4. Interview with Henry Cohen, Deputy City Administrator during Wagner Administration, February 3, 1972.

vaccine should be distributed free to families on relief would be subject to cabinet meeting debate.

Beyond the formality of a previously prepared and distributed agenda, the meetings were free-wheeling, uninhibited and at times lengthy. The mayor would sit and listen and often say little.[5] He would ask questions, probing ones, but never chide advisors or bully them as LaGuardia often did.[6] As a cabinet associate said: "His greatest assets (were) a cast-iron behind and an awesomely retentive memory."[7] When all positions were advocated a vote usually was taken. If the vote were unanimous, Wagner would go along. If it were divided, he would make the final decision, often after several days. He liked to work then by a committee or council situation, he distrusted snap decisions and believed "when in doubt, don't."[8] At ad hoc meetings the same process usually prevailed, except for the fact that other participants were involved and one particular issue was discussed. For example, when the question of a change in the make-up of the Board of Education's budget was concerned, i.e. there was discussion among Board members, city budget officials and civic agencies that the line-by-line composition of the school budget was unsatisfactory and not very pragmatic from

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5. Kentworthy, op. cit., pp. 25-30.

6. Interview with Frank Karelson, Education Aide to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, February 2, 1970.

7. Time, October 5, 1956.

8. New York Times, August 3, 1956.

the Board's point of view (for it meant that little flexibility could be exercised by the Board when they wished to drop an allocated program or expand another one for they had to get City approval) Wagner called all interested parties to City Hall to discuss the problem and possible solutions. As a participant in that meeting described, the table was divided among educators and economists. It was up to Wagner. He decided to go with the educators, saying "what is good for education just might be good politics."[9] Indeed he reasoned correctly. For it gave the responsibility of accounting for their appropriation to the educators. The question of accountability could not be laid at the mayor's door. In addition, it warranted good press, an extremely important issue for any mayor, holding a city together with band-aids. A good press usually results from less, rather than more, interference in the affairs of city departments.[10] Especially in education this has been true and after LaGuardia's experience Wagner knew the equation for press success. Charges then of indecisiveness, slowness and dependence on advisers in following this cabinet system approach were more often than not overlooked by the majority of his supporters when they saw amicable solutions resolving their problems.

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9. Interview with Frederick McLaughlin, Public Education Association President, August 21, 1969 and May 28, 1970.

10. Lowi, "Machine Politics--Old and New," op. cit., p. 86.

Wagner had reason to feel then that urban mayors operated most efficiently when viewed as mediators and conciliators, referees between and among conflicting groups and pressures. He believed that although a mayor made some enemies by using such a style, these groups usually always got a slice of the action and thus rarely were so vehemently opposed to him that they would not vote for him at the next election. Echoes of his father's admonition: "Don't alienate them son, they're all voters" always seemed to resound in the political corriders of Wagner's mind.

Besides being good for the politican, Wagner's style seemed in many cases to offer stability to the city-at-large. For it was an effective cover for advancing city policy--by the putting of demands and goals at mediation meetings in a proper perspective appropriate to a given situation, the mayor could advocate a compromise policy that might have been frowned on by all groups originally as not meeting their needs but after negotiation and assessment of their relative strength and position, they might later see it as the most advantageous course to follow.

He realized this was particularly true in the field of education. From his Manhattan community councils, he knew there was much antagonism between the community, local

school officials and central headquarters. Little communication existed and as a result poor planning for both the replacement and renovation of schools existed. He knew the professional staff at the Board was often responsible for this and with the result of the post-war baby boom he knew the city was in great need of more and better schools. Money was being pumped into Board coffers quickly and often. City officials, particularly Comptroller Gerosa, began to criticize these Wagner-sponsored appropriations, claiming that schools were not being built soundly or repaired adequately, because the Board's construction department was rife with corruption, their method of payment to contractors involved tremendous red tape and other bureaucratic complications. The Board's retort was usually that their budgetary allocations were too small which made it almost impossible to build let alone renovate school buildings. They called for more money. Gerosa called for an investigation. And a State Investigation Commission called for hearings.

Wagner, the Ivy League manager-administrator politician, knew that the resolution of this problem did not lay with Tammany. He knew that professionalism had replaced the machine as a key participant in city affairs[11] and that bureaucratic needs would have to be met before any real

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11. Lowi, "Machine Politics--Old and New," op. cit., p. 86.

accommodation would be made. Thus in his first mayoralty year he sought to quiet the clamor by increasing school seating capacity by 20,000, granting a capital budgetary allocation of $162 million for 25 new school constructions and additions which would raise the seating capacity by another 39,000 seats, allowing for over 1,000 new teaching positions and allocating $13.5 million for teacher's salaries with a promise of greater funds in the near future.[12] In one swoop Wagner tried to give something to each group - to interfere positively in education. But mainly he sympathized with the professionals - more money, more jobs, better teaching conditions. It was a group he would continue to cultivate.

In exercising his appointive powers in education he was particularly anxious to select the most competent and well-recognized civic-oriented people for Board membership, thus following his belief in putting strong people in decision-making positions. He felt the 3-3-3 religious breakdown (3 Protestants, 3 Catholics and 3 Jews) of the Board did not insure quality and broke it by choosing individuals regardless of their religious affiliation.

This break was precedent setting and raised the

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12. Kentworthy, op. cit., pp. 30-32.

hackles of many groups in the city. New York City political appointments have always been weighted heavily with ethnic and religious considerations.[13] In 1920 between 60 and 70% of all cabinet appointments in the city were held by native-Americans, English and Irish, with no more than 15% going to all other groups combined.[14] By 1960 the precentages may have been changed but not the practice--especially with regard to the Board of Education. But in 1963 Wagner, sought to disregard the religious factor when appointing a new member, by selecting a man of the Jewish faith to replace a Catholic. The Brooklyn Catholic weekly, The Tablet, claimed Wagner had acted in a discriminatory way[15] and tried diligently "to revive the...theory that a public body must show a balance of denominations if it is not to be discriminatory."[16] The New York Board of Rabbis, along with the Archdiocese of New York and the Protestant Council of New York further petitioned Governor Rockefeller to correct the imbalance stressing that "religious groups (are)...an important segment of total community life(and) have a specific contribution to make in the consideration of educational policies."[17] Their

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13. Lowi, At the Pleasure of the Mayor, op. cit., p. 34.
14. Ibid., p. 35.
15. New York Times, May 18, 1963.
16. New York Times, October 2, 1963.
17. New York Times, October 3, 1963.

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argument however fell on deaf-ears. The precedent was set.

Further, Wagner commissioned highly-regarded educators and administrators to study the school system, such as former New York University president and Ford Foundation head, Henry Heald, City Administrator, Charles Preusse, and Great Neck School Board President, Max Rubin (later to be President of the New York City Board of Education). When their reports were completed he would meet with Board officials, either at Gracie Mansion, or at City Hall, or at the Board to discuss implementation. The committee system got people talking. The rest was up to Wagner--to assess the problems, to recognize weaknesses and strengths of arguments advanced and to enunciate possible courses of action. Often at this stage, if not before, Wagner would commence working on another level.

The second level approach that Wagner used was that of covert-initiator. Here he sat center-stage, was not visible to the citizenry, issued no public statements, had no newspaper coverage. He set up contacts and meetings among the powerholders and participants in a given problem area. He worked quietly among these men--maneuvering gracefully, eliciting their positions, demands and needs and discussing possible solutions without the glare of television cameras or flashbulbs. This was where policy more often

than not was shaped. Although closed, even clandestine, meetings are part of administrative behavior, Wagner was especially successful because of what he brought to these meetings -- his prestigious Democratic heritage, his knowledge of the nuts and bolts of city government, his acquaintance with most highly placed or influential people in the town, his ability to make all participants believe they were getting the best share of the pie. He was thus able to amass tremendous, unharnessed political influence on this level. He knew it and used it judiciously, though often, and his adversaries also knew it. It wasn't just the office of mayor they were dealing with, or legitimate authority; they were dealing with a superb political jockey who usually knew how to win the race by using a level two approach. John Lindsay, his successor, would find that the race would be difficult to win--he used almost exclusively the highly visible level one approach.

One particular episode during Wagner's administration in the field of education vividly sets out mayoralty successfulness of this approach.

During a teacher-Board bargaining session in the early 1960s concerning principally working conditions and salaries of the city's teachers, it looked as if a strike were the only way of realizing certain demands by the Union.

Charles Cogen, president of the Teachers Guild, at the time issued an overt threat. The newspapers received word and headlined their dailies with the information -- the New York City school teachers were about to strike. The implications were devastating for a city like New York: over a million children would be on the streets, studies would be interrupted, delinquency would increase and in many cases, children would go hungry. The president of the Board of Education, fearful of the actualization of such a threat, immediately telephoned the mayor to discuss the situation and seek a solution. The mayor gave no ready answer but told the president not to issue a counterthreat or use any inflammatory language to widen the gulf. He further said he would meet with certain key people and then arrive at a decision. The president of the Board was, however, to keep in contact with him. Wagner then called his second level approach into action. His quick recall served well here. He remembered having seen a newspaper interview-article with Charles Cogen weeks before which discussed abstractly the use of the mediation process to realize union demands. Cogen, interviewed at the time, had been quoted as saying that he did not favor mediation per se, but if people like lawyer and education-specialist, Frank Karelson, lawyer, Simon Rifkind, and/or labor mediator, Theodore Kheel, were involved in such mediation proceedings, he would find it far more

appealing. Wagner immediately contacted his education liaison, Ruth Farbman, a former president of the United Parents Association and well-known in education circles, to uncover the information and present it to him. He called in his closest aides to discuss the pros and cons of interfering directly in the situation. Other civic group leaders were contacted and met at City Hall. They suggested approaching the three people Cogen had mentioned. Others felt interference would breach the mayor's non-political role in education. No firm decision was reached. Wagner slept on it and then decided upon the following course: he called the Board president, with article in hand, and suggested that a Karelson-Kheel-Rifkind mediation panel might be the key to resolving the imminent crisis. The president of the Board agreed. Wagner, however, required two things: (1) that the meeting of all principal participants be held at 110 Livingston Street, Board headquarters, rather than at City Hall. In this way, it would appear to both the press and citizenry that the Board was conducting the negotiation, with the mayor merely an observer; (2) Wagner wanted the Board called into secret session to vote upon his authority as chief negotiator. The Board president agreed to both conditions. Wagner then contacted the three men and asked them to serve as mediators. They agreed. With the exception of certain civic leaders

and education groups, no one else was privy to the plan. Thus it worked smoothly. There were no cries of interference let alone politicking.

The meeting with Cogen was scheduled at Board headquarters. The mayor appeared, the New York Times article tucked neatly in his inside shirt pocket. All participants discussed the situation, their positions and their constituencies' needs. Before long the negotiations appeared stalemated. Wagner then casually suggested the possibility of mediation as a method of arriving at a fair solution. Cogen refused outright. Wagner then mentioned the possibility of a Karelson-Kheel-Rifkind mediation panel. Cogen at first hesitated and then hastily called for a recess. After conferring with aides he agreed to mediation. Wagner quietly slipped the Times article from his shirt, unfolded it and placed it in Cogen's hand.[18]

As suggested, Wagner seldom shot quickly or erratically from the hip but gauged the demands and power of his adversary before suggesting a solution, plan or compromise. His two level approach usually was operating simultaneously, with level two determining the mayor's level one actions. This was especially important in education, where he was

18. Account of Cogen episode told by both Robert F. Wagner and Frank Karelson at separate interviews. Interview with Robert F. Wagner, mayor, November 24, 1969. Interview with Frank Karelson, op. cit.

dealing with men who were used to and prized their independence of thought and action. To steamroller them overtly would create immediate confrontation and future alienation. The professionals, as suggested earlier, were gaining more power and prestige in the bureaucracies. This had been a plank of reform-minded individual groups and politicians for years in New York City -- let merit not politics determine the bureaucratic leadership. What with lucrative collective bargaining contracts being negotiated the professional organization's ranks were stronger and more unified. They would become a powerful bloc. Thus level two had to be especially sensitive.

The artillery of the press was a force to be used carefully and decisively on level one, never level two. He courted them with caution and, by and large, in his first two administrations they treated Wagner kindly and sympathetically saying "he has shown unusual energy and consistent benelovence."[19] Even the Republican-oriented Herald Tribune praised him as a "consummate diplomat--a marvelously patient conciliator."[20]

This then was the Wagner style of stewarding the city. He was not a LaGuardia, or a Walker or an O'Dwyer. He didn't want to be that kind of mayor. He didn't think the voters wanted that kind of a mayor. He knew plainly the

19. New York Post, May 3, 1954.
20. Herald Tribune, January 2, 1964.

difference between positive and negative interference and sought outwardly to appear as a guardian never an interloper. He liked working with a group of advisers, to play a low-key role, to get the most for the city and himself politically by efficiency not flamboyance. Only when he saw his policies or his politics in jeopardy did he change his tactics.

the situation started to fester.

The rhetoric of education without mayoralty influence soon changed. Wagner immediately hit Theobald by ordering him "...to proceed directly to Gracie Mansion when you debark...,"[13] (for he was in Europe on a Ford Foundation grant) and to the Board: "I demand that those educational officials who are responsible for the daily operations of our schools, either live up to the responsibility given to them, or else it may be necessary to place a check rein on their independence. They can have their choice. For me, there is only one choice - a well run school system."[14]

The message was not covert, no secret messages seemed to have taken place. Wagner no longer dragged his feet. After meeting with deplaned Theobald and Charles Silver and City Investigator Kaplan he ordered Theobald to suspend the 30-odd employees accused of corrupt practices saying that "we will not tolerate this kind of breach of ethics, petty corruption of any kind....I have pledged to root out corruption wherever it exists and I will keep my pledge."[15] Later, he would ask for the removal of Joseph Weiss.[16]

Wagner on June 22nd declared his candidacy for

13. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, June 2, 1961.
14. Ibid.
15. World Telegram, June 10, 1961.
16. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, July 19, 1961.

a third term as New York City's mayor. Because of his independence in appointments during the preceding years, his allegiance to and support from Tammany Hall had lessened. In addition, the good government groups were becoming restless with machine politics and were mounting a campaign against boss-dictated candidates.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, reform movements in New York City politics spring up usually after many years of Democratic Party control. The reformers, on a platform of rooting out corruption, form a fusion alliance with Republicans, Liberals, and disenchanted Democrats in an effort to win an election. However, the movement tends to be short-lived and cyclical.[17] The reasons for this phenomenon are basically two-fold: (1) although widespread and energetic at the beginning, they have difficulty in maintaining the momentum throughout a campaign and thus never elect their candidate; or (2) they elect their candidate, gain partial redress from Tammany, and feeling satisfied, disperse. Since there is no institutionalized mechanisms to maintain or advance their platform, their candidate is seldom re-elected. The movement thus withers away.

The reformers of the 1950-1960s were a new breed. They were, by and large, young, professional, liberal-minded

17. Lowi, At the Pleasure of the Mayor, op. cit., pp. 185, 186.

men and women. Over one-half of their membership consisted of Jewish lawyers.[18] They had worked hard for professional advancement, had achieved a relatively comfortable position and were not now about to wait in line to see one's political leader before making decisions. They considered that practice rather slavish and undignified.[19]

Thus these reformers sought to usher in a new philosophy of reform--one that "did not attack the regular party organization from the outside in general elections, did not rely on legislative investigations, newspaper crusades or grand jury indictments,"[20] but did challenge the organization internally by contesting primaries involving district and county leadership positions and by seeking to capture and control district clubs, staff and party hierarchy and the party bureaucracy.[21] Thus these new reformers were interested in changing the system from within rather than without. The ramifications of such new thought as pointed out by one of their county leaders, Edward Costikyan, was that bad political leaders had to be replaced

18. Edward Banfield and James Wilson, City Politics (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 145-6.
19. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot (2nd ed.; Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1970), p. 227.
20. Banfield and Wilson, op. cit., p. 32.
21. Ibid., p. 40.

and that the Party had been too autocratic and needed to become more democratic. To effect these reforms a permanent reform base in the Party had to be established.[22]

By 1961 the reformers had fought hard to secure a base and felt stable and strong enough to confront the Tammany leader, Carmine DeSapio. He, in turn, sought to purge all reform district leaders.[23] The lines were drawn.

Wagner had seen the sentiment over the last few years leaning toward reform and realized to secure the allegiance of these groups he had to disavow the machine. He had ameliorated that connection in 1957 when he ran with Liberal Party support but realized that this was 1961 and in order to score well at the polls he had to divorce himself from the machine. That was even more evident in early June with the corruption crisis in the schools. If anything went hand in hand it was machine-dominated politics and corruption. He had to make his position crystal clear.

At his press conference he sought support from all quarters--he needed it to defeat Tammany. "I have been supported in the past by, and will accept again, the Liberal Party, whose membership is and always has been sympathetic to the type of government I have run. I have had the support

22. Edward N. Costikyan, Behind Closed Doors (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 18.
23. Banfield & Wilson, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

appealing. Wagner immediately contacted his education liaison, Ruth Farbman, a former president of the United Parents Association and well-known in education circles, to uncover the information and present it to him. He called in his closest aides to discuss the pros and cons of interfering directly in the situation. Other civic group leaders were contacted and met at City Hall. They suggested approaching the three people Cogen had mentioned. Others felt interference would breach the mayor's non-political role in education. No firm decision was reached. Wagner slept on it and then decided upon the following course: he called the Board president, with article in hand, and suggested that a Karelson-Kheel-Rifkind mediation panel might be the key to resolving the imminent crisis. The president of the Board agreed. Wagner, however, required two things: (1) that the meeting of all principal participants be held at 110 Livingston Street, Board headquarters, rather than at City Hall. In this way, it would appear to both the press and citizenry that the Board was conducting the negotiation, with the mayor merely an observer; (2) Wagner wanted the Board called into secret session to vote upon his authority as chief negotiator. The Board president agreed to both conditions. Wagner then contacted the three men and asked them to serve as mediators. They agreed. With the exception of certain civic leaders

CHAPTER VI

THE 1961 SCHOOL SCANDAL

> From the time of consolidation of the city in 1898, the Board of Education has been embroiled in one controversy after the other...but none had the result of the present one.
>
> New York Times,
> August 27, 1961.

"Mayor Robert Wagner was greeted by a rat yesterday," the New York Times reported.[1] Other newspapers went on to explain that this was different from other encounters that the mayor faced daily because indeed this was a real live rodent. In fact, it was suggested that the testy fellow would only leave the presence of the mayor at the insistence of a school principal's broom. The incident, needless to say, caught fire and the schools were on the carpet. After all, it was acknowledged that school space was at a premium but it was not thought that the schools in operation were infested with mice, rats and all sorts of vermin. What about the children in those schools?

1. New York Times, May 31, 1961.

The situation was ripe for criticism. New York City Comptroller Gerosa was the first to enter the picture, charging that $100 million had been wasted by the Board of Education all during the 1950s.[2] One school official claimed that ten-pound cinderblocks broke loose from the ceiling of one school and crashed into the auditorium, conjecturing that "the weight of those blocks could have killed a child."[3] Others had pictures to substantiate their claims that school roofs leaked, ceilings fell, floors were shaky. The schools claimed they just didn't have enough money to waste as Gerosa was claiming or to correctwhat the newspapers were reporting.

The city leaders knew that the schools had different and more demanding pressures placed on them during the last number of years. With population shifts, the Negro percentage alone during the 1950's increased from 4% to 14% while the Puerto Rican citizenry doubled from 3% to 6.7%,4 young minority families with numerous children saw their hope of future urban socialization and success not in the marketplace but in the schools. Their children needed schools in order to learn. The post-World War II baby boom market also needed school seats. Concomitant with school seats, parents questioned

2. New York Times, May 29, 1961.
3. New York Times, June 6, 1961.
4. Blanche Bernstein, "The Distribution of Income in New York," The Public Interest, No. 20 (Summer, 1970), p. 2.

the educators when their Johnny couldn't read cereal box advertisements, let alone elementary primers, and the leaders of the marketplace, in a psychological state of shock, asked naively why Russia and not America was first in space. The educators said little except that they needed additional funds and control over their own purse-strings, for as in most urban cities, City Hall controlled both appropriations and allocations.

To stifle the various cries, the schools sought to temper the demands of their various constituencies by advancing a quick solution -- give us more money and we will build more schools. Somehow, the pattern to school problems always seemed to divide along these lines, more money and more schools. Somehow a new modern shiny school was equated with curing educational ills in addition to social ills. A new school seemed to provide an answer to the question why Spanish children couldn't speak English, or why the black youth crime rate had increased, or why there were high drop-out rates, or poor reading scores, or why the U.S. didn't have a Sputnik. Thus this panacea would be the solution for public officials, parentsand students. Unfortunately, it also seemed to be the solution of educators. Or so convincingly did they espouse it that they won the fiscal battle, for funds were increased yearly by public officials. By the early 1960's the Board of Education's budget allocation

for construction and maintenance had reached close to $130 million annually. Yet with all of that money, old schools remained unpainted, roofs leaked and cinderblocks fell. In addition, none of the schools' critics was satisfied. It was perfect for an attack by anyone - especially an aspiring politician.

Gerosa was just such an aspiring politician whose repeated charges in the late 1950s and 1960s necessitated the Board of Education to defend its position. Charles Silver, president of the Board, called for both the city and state to make studies of the Board, its management and administration.

The city report, authorized by Charles Preusse, the City Administrator, boldly stated that "we find tremendous internal diffusion of responsibility...we find lack of strong competent, centralized leadership over school buildings, maintenance and operation,...we find inadequate advance planning with major decisions...we find little evidence of any systematic cost controls of school building products."[5] Their recommendations sought new methods of appointing Board members, restricting policy-making duties solely to Board members, and having school planning and construction functions

5. Charles F. Preusse, Board of Education: Organization and Management of School Planning and Construction (New York: Office of City Administrator, 1959), pp. 7-8.

divided into separate units. It was an impressive study, admitting general Board of Education sloppiness in administration but there was, however, no mention of corruption among Board of Education personnel.

On the heels of the Preusse Report came the State report which in many respects mirrored the city's findings. The Division of Housing of the Board of Education was found to be uncoordinated, with weak leadership and little planning or research activities. It called for a new director for construction, one with experience and strong leadership capabilities.[6] Again, it quashed Gerosa's direct assault on corruption but indirectly acknowledged waste of money because of poor administration.

The Board set about to remedy its construction shop by commissioning another study, this time by its own personnel, Secretary of the Board, Harold Hay, and Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Bernard Donovan. The rhetoric was strong, decisive and exactly what public officials and the citizenry wanted to hear: "(we) seek to revamp our school

6. Henry Heald, School Construction in New York City: The Report of the State Education Commission's Committee on Inquiry into Charges of Waste and Extravagance in the Construction of School Buildings in New York City (New York: The University of the State of New York, State Education Department, 1959), pp. 28-47.

of Liberal Republicans...and will welcome their help again. But political parties do not make up the entire electorate. I have solicited the advice and support of the substantial business community in this city and organized labor has always been able to enter City Hall...via the front door. My support has stemmed from the broadest panorama of city life and this is how it should be."[24] He neglected to say that their support was absolutely essential if he were to continue to be the man to open that door.

Wagner knew that the state would soon be involved in the educational picture, conducting public hearings into school affairs. He wasn't quite sure what was to be unearthed but undoubtedly he knew he had to be at the forefront of the situation if he were to win over the city groups. Unfortunately, Tammany needed to get their man into City Hall to survive. It picked Arthur Levitt, state controller, and a strong organization man to be Wagner's adversary in the fall primary. Interestingly, Levitt, had been the President of the Board of Education in the mid-1950's and had an intimate knowledge of educational affairs. He could be potentially dangerous.

Wagner tried to calm the educational waters by two more direct actions: asking the Corporation Counsel's

24. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, June 22, 1961.

office to bring suits against construction firms accused of performing shoddy construction and repair work and proposing that the responsibility for building schools and keeping them in good condition be taken out of the hands of educators and given to construction experts in a new city department saying: "I think now we must take a fresh, bold approach."[25] This indeed was overstepping mayoralty bounds in education. It somehow resembled LaGuardia's Bureau of Supplies scenario. As would be expected, cries of protest were emitted from the Board and civic groups such as the Public Education Association claiming that "no efficiency will be served by such a move."[26] Wagner quickly dropped the idea--he didn't want to alienate voters--and he needed these voters, first in the primary and then in the general election. His future interferences would have to be more circumspect.

The New York State Commission of Investigation seized center-stage in late June in a jammed to capacity hearing room at 270 Broadway, charging that "...there is good reason to believe that (the) proliferating bureaucracy...is itself the biggest rat in the school system,..."[27] and pledging to "penetrate the Board of Education's citadel of indifference."[28]

25. New York Post, June 18, 1961.
26. Herald Tribune, June 20, 1961.
27. Ibid.
28. A Report by the New York State Commission of Investigation: An Investigation of the New York City School Construction Program (January, 1962), p. 62.

The Commission began to uncover its findings: a custodian from a Bronx junior high school told of 25 lb. cement blocks crashing down from a school ceiling, barely missing students. He claimed that "some of those blocks had been put in place without a damn thing holding them."[29] Pictures were shown of split walls, peeling ceilings and the like. The tabloids ate it up. Then came the more damaging information -- Weiss, the Deputy Superintendent of Construction was accused of taking $500 a month from an engineering firm he had hired for Board work while working at the Board. He denied this as a kickback but had difficulty in locating personal financial records to substantiate his claims. He told the press that "...in the helter-skelter of moving from private practice as an engineer into my present office I did lose some of my records."[30] The Commission had to subpoena him to appear claiming he had been far from cooperative. The Commission next hit a Board member. It uncovered the fact that Charles Bensley, Bronx' Board member and chairman of the Board's Building and Sites Committee, was president of a company that owned a piece of Washington Heights property selected as part of the site for a new elementary school -- a school site recently voted on by Bensley.[31] Bensley quickly defended himself. He acknowledged

29. Daily News, June 21, 1961.
30. New York Post, June 14, 1961.
31. Daily News, June 21, 1961.

that he did vote on the site, without any knowledge that his company had an interest in the property and when he discovered it, quickly notified the other Board members and Secretary of the Board to disqualify his vote. He succeeded in gracefully extricating himself from that situation but became involved in another one soon after, when the Commission called Michael Radoslovick, director of architecture for the Board, to the witness stand. Radoslovick indicated that Tammany had dictated the selection of architects for school buildings. He admitted that at Seymour Gang's direction (he happened to be coincidentally confidential secretary to Board member Bensley), he solicited campaign contributions for Tammany politicians among private architectural firms doing business with the city. Gang was summoned to the hearings to either refute or substantiate these comments. He stated that "my memory is clear. I know I never was engaged in political fund-raising. It is not part of my existence. I would regard it as improper in my position."[32] Jacob Grumet, a Commission member, retorted bluntly: "Frankly, the impression we got is that you are not being frank with us."[33] Bensley was brought into the picture by the State Commission relative to the Gang affair, but pleaded innocence again. He left a rather clumsy, corrupt image behind.

32. Bernard Bard, "Link Tammany to School Architects," New York Post, June 20, 1961.
33. Ibid.

Wagner certainly noted and remembered this Tammany connection two months later, when a sacrifice had to be made. The sacrifice would be Bensley, among others. It was known that he had close connections with Buckley's Bronx Democratic Party--a strong supporter of DeSapio and the regulars, Wagner's current political adversaries. To protect Bensley would alienate the reformers and jeopardize Wagner's standing seriously. Thus, he would only protect the people he could trust politically.

While these hearings continued, Superintendent of Schools John Theobald was busy defending the school system. He wouldn't suspend the 30-odd school employees pending a more thorough investigation of charges,[34] he found no "public schools in which faulty construction endangered the lives and well-being of pupils,"[35] he credited Weiss, with doing a superb job of improving building operations and claimed that the rat episode in the Harlem school Wagner had visited was merely a publicity stunt. In sum, he found all their charges and accusations a jolting experience but when asked whether he intended to stay on as School Superintendent he replied confidently "Yes, of course."[36]

By the middle of July, he was jolted again and less confident when it was discovered that in 1960 he had a

34. Herald Tribune, June 13, 1961.
35. New York Times, June 26, 1961.
36. World Telegram, June 10, 1961.

construction program...to remove delays...to develop a broad policy declaration for the construction programs... and to report to the Board of Education on the (future) programs of the school maintenance and repair programs."[7]

The mayor, in keeping with his philosophy toward the education establishment, that the schools operated best when devoid of political interference, remained silent and inactive.

Public interest groups applauded the reports but generated little controversy or excitement. These were, after all, old hat findings and recommendations. These same findings, less than two years later though, were to cause a crisis that was unprecedented in New York City's school history. What caused it all?

1961 was an election year for New York City. The mayoralty was up for grabs, and, as traditionally is the case, the grabbers were many. For a grabber to step outside the circle of contenders and become a potential threat to the incumbent, he must seek an issue that is popular, that has wide-spread interest and appeal, that is costly and dissatisfying a large group of people. For the incumbent, it is

7. Harold F. Hay and Bernard E. Donovan, Proposals Developed For Consideration by the Board of Education as an Interim Step Toward the Implementation of the Recommendations Contained in the Preusse-Allen Reports (New York: Board of Education, 1959), pp. 2-3.

necessary to reduce vulnerability by keeping all fronts of the administration guarded in an effort to keep such an issue from sprouting. That can best be achieved by having city agencies keep their houses in order, free from large-scale criticism and attack. Wagner had sought to follow this plan.

One house became extremely vulnerable, however, in the latter part of May, 1961. Interestingly enough, the keepers of the house started the assault. The Board of Education released to the media the news that it had barred two construction companies from doing further business with New York City schools. At first, the news seemed routine, for the Board, aware of a State investigation of its activities and the anticipated political attacks on its construction programs, had from the first of the year issued news releases as to the streamlining of both construction and maintenance procedures at Board headquarters.[8] However, when it became clear that one of the construction companies barred was Caristo Construction Company, a $30 million a year enterprise and a builder of 49% of the city's schools since 1946, further interest was generated. Why was the Board barring them, what had they done, what information had the Board uncovered?

8. Herald Tribune, January 26, 1961; New York Times, April 29, 1961.

Gerosa's claims haunted the situation. The Board calmly issued another release stating it was acting on information received from the city's Department of Investigation "regarding certain facts pertaining to the award of a general construction job for P.S. 203 in Queens in 1959."[9]

Reportedly, Caristo Construction Company and Mars Associates & Normel Construction Corp. submitted tie bids of $1.4 million for the construction of this particular school. In solving the problem of who would be awarded the contract, it was uncovered that Deputy Superintendent of Schools for Construction, Joseph Weiss, informally tossed a coin with the understanding that the loser would receive a "consolidation prize" of between $10-11,000 from the winner. Caristo won the toss. Supposedly, when this situation was discovered, it was declared improper by Board of Education officials and a formal drawing took place. Caristo won again and was awarded the contract. After having built the school, Caristo asked the Board in 1961 for final reimbursement. It was only then upon investigation that these facts were publicly announced. Caristo denied any wrongdoing, claiming that the Board of Education properly awarded it the contract and knew and acknowledged a practice in thefield of granting consolation prizes when tie bids were involved. Although Caristo secured

9. New York Times, May 6, 1961.

reimbursement, the Board voted to bar it from future bidding.[10] At the same time it also barred Normel from bidding.

Before a few days had elapsed, City Commissioner of Investigation, Louis Kaplan, publicly informed mayor Wagner that his investigations of the construction operations of the school system uncovered large-scale corruption and accused 15 former and 32 present Board of Education inspectors and supervisors of having accepted money and other gifts from contractors working on city schools.

The fires were further fanned by reports that new schools, less than three years old were falling apart, with doors stuck, walls cracked, masonry and concrete portions of buildings falling and endangering the lives of children. In one particular school, it was noted that a water fountain in the main lobby had run hot water for four years. Nobody had fixed it, yet it had been reported in complaints by the principal and custodian for four successive years.[11] The newspapers also secured a Fire Department inspection report of the schools citing 1800 violations in some of the school buildings they had visited.

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10. New York Times, May 26, 1961.

11. World Telegram, June 22, 1961.

Hysteria developed and gained momentum. The Board trying to reduce the groundswell quickly announced that they had declared an emergency situation, awarded contracts for painting and repairs, gave school principals the authority to hire local mechanics for repairs and authorized an additional $65,000 to the Bureau of Maintenance.[12]

The clamor rather than dissipating, heightened.

Wagner immediately saw the situation for all it was worth -- this was an election year and the grabbers would be out to capitalize on the situation, blaming him for the school mess, for not seeing to the implementation of both the Preusse and Heald reports, for placing good friends in strategic school positions, i.e. John Theobald, his former deputy mayor, was now Superintendent of Schools and Joseph Weiss, a boyhood friend, was Deputy Superintendent for School Construction. If there were corruption, certainly these men should have been aware of it, and being so close to the mayor, the proximity almost spelled complicity. It was indeed a bad situation for an incumbent mayor who was about to declare his intention of running for a third term, a third term without Tammany backing.

Something dramatic would have to be done before

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12. New York Times, June 6, 1961.

boat built for his own personal use by students at East New York Vocational High School in Brooklyn. The materials for the 15-1/2' runabout the Nipper allegedly had not been paid for. No receipts could be produced. Theobald admitted that the boat had been built in his brother-in-law's name. The whole story seemed to have holes in it. He, along with the Nipper, needed bailing out.

Wagner had remained silent during the early Commission hearings while Tammany was being raked over the coals. He stored up the ammunition for use later.

However, the Theobald boat episode had to be dealt with quickly. He directed Kaplan to "dig right to the very bottom of the circumstances."[37]

A Brooklyn grand jury soon called Theobald into its corridors. The Superintendent hurried into the hearings to clear his name. Although no evidence was found to warrant criminal action, his unbecoming conduct had cost him his legitimacy. Brooklyn District Attorney Koota summed up the situation by saying "It's up to the Board of Education to decide whether Theobald showed proper judgment in having a boat built for himself."[38]

37. New York Times, July 15, 1961.
38. New York Times, August 3, 1961.

From the inception of the controversy the Board of Education through its president took an outwardly strong stand. Silver in early June commented "the mayor is out of it--definitely...the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools make it clear that they are responsible for the operation of the public schools of the City of New York and, therefore, are willing to accept responsibility for any shortcomings of the system...."[39] At its monthly meeting in June it blasted the mayor's recommendation for creating a separate city department for school construction and seemed to carry enough authority and prestige to quash the mayor on that policy suggestion. However, as events unfolded that prestige and authority quickly eroded.

First, the State Investigation Commission, had called Board member Charles Bensley to task. Next Theobald had been admonished. Following that Charles Silver, in an effort to appear concerned and active, initiated a series of school tours to check for himself the conditions of schools. Rather than assuage the bad publicity, he intensified it by alienating the teacher's union. In one of his visits to an East Harlem school, he was shocked at conditions and was quoted by the press as saying that the school classrooms were "no place for a dog."[40] He went on further to exclaim:

39. World Telegram, June 6, 1961.
40. New York Times, July 8, 1961.

"How the hell in a democracy can you send children in here... How can a principal be so dumb as not to ask to paint these rooms?"[41] The United Federation of Teachers was certainly not taking this insult lying down. Although relatively quiet during the June and July events, they immediately took Silver to task for applying the word "dumb" to the principal of P.S. 57 for not requesting a paint job. Silver was breaching professional ethics by outwardly and publicly lambasting a schoolman, and whether he was on the carpet or not, he couldn't break the rules of the game. Silver, angry, hardened rather than softened his blows against the Union. "Let them go there! Let them try to do something constructive themselves instead of criticizing other people.... As for their statement that I should have given Mr. Horowitz (the school principal) a chance last Friday to make a statement--where was I going to find him. In the mountains?"[42] That finished Silver and for all intent the Board. The union would no longer support him. By the end of that very day, the union had called for Silver's resignation and by the end of the month they would demand the ouster of the Board. It was a clumsy stroke by Silver, for in striking out at a principal he was alienating not only principals and supervisors particularly, but somehow taking to task all teaching personnel too. Traditionally,

41. Ibid.
42. Herald Tribune, July 10, 1961.

teachers viewed principals and other supervisors and administrators as part of "management" and few if any alliances between the two took place. But Silver's actions and the Board's general fumbling threatened the school system as a whole and resulted in a unified stance by the entire bureaucracy. That stance would be especially detrimental, given the fact that the Union had made giant strides in increasing its followers and was about to be declared the sole bargaining agent for the schools' teachers. Thus, the bureaucracy became a political bloc not to be alienated.[43]

The Board learned little from this encounter and seemed to alienate at each turn another group, including its own members. Francis Adams, a former Police Commissioner in the earlier Wagner administration, and a Wagner-appointed Board member since 1958, became incensed by the entire situation, including most pointedly, the Board and Superintendent's actions and called a press conference. He accused his fellow Board members and Dr. Theobald of "trying to minimize the current school scandal."[44] He went on to say that neither had "fairly and squarely" faced the situation.[45]

Further, a letter from Adams to Silver was made public which reflected Adams' disgust with school conditions

43. Lowi, "Machine Politics--Old and New," op. cit., p. 86.
44. New York Times, July 20, 1961.
45. Ibid.

and entreated Silver to make a "frank and open statement by the Board of whatever was wrong in the system"[46]

The Board responded to Adams' charges not at all. They moved slowly and it wasn't until the beginning of August that the Board held a special session to discuss with District Attorney Koota the Theobald charges. However, it was a point to be well noted. Internal dissension of Board members often existed, but this became public and painted a picture of a Board in grave difficulty with both itself and its constituencies.

The media saw the sensationalism value of the scandal. Even though graft and corruption are recognized casually by most New Yorkers as part and parcel of city life, it is an issue that sells newspapers. School construction scandals, were not new to New York City, it was by and large a traditional issue -- something that was uncovered by some commission or political hopeful every ten years or so. It was always ripe -- a tremendous amount of city funds went into this program yearly and what with construction company bidding, architects, inspectors, maintenance crews and the like, many succumbed to the quick and easy bribe. Although the issue was almost a cliche, the actors were always new and different and for that reason alone, probably, whetted the appetites of readers.

46. Letter from Francis Adams, to Charles Silver, July 19, 1961.

Needless to say, all the local newspapers, gave the scandal daily coverage. As events quickened and tempers flared, the August papers gave it daily front-page attention with banner headlines. Early editorials were rather neutral, not pointing the finger at anyone, just claiming that the "public's confidence in the administration of New York City's school system is badly shaken,"[47] or stating that the "public must insist that the current investigation of the schools be thorough-going and definitive...."[48] The New York Post was perhaps most direct "question(ing) whether the direction of the City's $6 million a year school system should be left in the hands of a Board of Education...."[49] Interestingly, none of the newspapers attacked the mayor's early interference in the schools, his rather strong and domineering language to the Board to, in effect, either shape up or depart or his unprecedented policy suggestion to remove the construction function from the Board entirely and place it with the city directly. One can only conjecture that the press, believing Wagner's continually espoused mayoralty philosophy that the Board of Education was a separate and independent agency, felt the situation so serious that it warranted the chief magistrate's intervention. Intervention in the field of education by any mayor as suggested earlier has been usually denounced--claim-

47. New York Times, July 1, 1961.
48. Herald Tribune, June 20, 1961.
49. New York Post, June 22, 1961.

ing that politics should never be injected into the educational system. However, it is interesting to note that accountability for the school system has, more times than not, gone beyond the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools or the bureaucracy and has been laid at the mayor's feet. Somehow, he as the leader of the city, as the people's elected spokesman, must answer to the citizenry, quell fears and seek solutions. Certainly this situation didn't seem to suggest otherwise.

Civic good government groups and other educational participants remained relatively silent during the first part of the crisis. As already stated, when recommendations or criticisms were waged against their interests they retaliated, witness the Public Education Association's denunciation of Wagner's plan for a city construction department for education or the UFT's charges against Board President, Silver.

The State Congress of Parent Teacher Associations, through its assistant director, Dorothy Silverhardt, blandly stated that "parents have become generally disillusioned with the school board and that all the PTA's in town want to see a general cleanup."[50]

It was not until August that they began to take strong positions.

50. New York Post, August 4, 1961.

This was indeed a political year and the contest for the gold ring, the mayoralty, was being fought hard in three, rather than the customary two, arenas. It was Democrat against Democrat against Republican. But in June and July the Republicans hadn't seriously threatened the situation. It was Reform Democrat against Machine Democrat. As has been suggested, Wagner in the early years of his mayoralty was backed by Tammany. It was his winning of the city's high chair that strengthened DeSapio and the other borough machines. But that was close to ten years ago and much had changed. Wagner had alienated the Hall by acting more and more independent in his appointments. He picked highly qualified men that could handle the problems of their departments or agencies, rather than political hacks who rarely appeared at their desks. In addition, Lowi's cyclic phenomenon of reform politics was emerging but this time it was cast in a new light. Disenchanted Democrats were no longer serving as the backbone of fusion slates. Young, college educated, professionals, no longer abandoned the Party but believed that change could be realized within the Democratic Party's ranks if new-blood took over the power posts. These Reform Democrats believed further that political leaders generally were not bad per se, only bad political leaders were, that the principal flaw of past political leadership had been excessive control by too

few men at the helm of the political machinery and that prior good government, fusion efforts had failed because they were sporadic, impermanent and outside the established political machinery.[51] To correct these errors, the new reformers thus sought to throw the rascals out of the Party rather than merely City Hall.

They had gained strength in Manhattan, especially, and were anxious to use that strength to defeat the tiger. Local public opinion, along with the Liberal Party, supported them. The machine was in disfavor. Wagner, realized what could happen without their support and decided to go with them rather than against them. He was the prototype public-officerholder, his actions followed the votes. His actions then would steer him into direct confrontation with Tammany -- in the person of Arthur Levitt.

Levitt had a fine reputation, he had been elected state controller in 1954 and again in 1958. He was a proven vote-getter. In addition, he had, for this particular confrontation in education, the luster of a former Board president, far enough removed from the present happenings, having resigned in 1954, but close enough to the workings of the Board to be considered knowledgeable. Hopefully, then,

51. Edward N. Costikyan, op cit., p. 18.

the machine thought his pronouncements would have both authenticity and merit.

His blast was quick and direct. He blamed the mayor outright for the city's school problems, accusing him of "failure to exercise leadership, decision, strength, guidance and interest in the problems of our schools."[52] He further challenged him to a series of television debates "so that I may confront him with the reckless and irresponsible claims and charges he is making."[53]

Wagner, of course, immediately engaged in the verbal theatrics of a political campaign. "The statement of the boss-ridden candidate for mayor blaming the mayor for faults in the construction and administration of the schools is as irresponsible as his candidacy itself."[54] Wagner vowed to make a major address to the people of the city on the education crisis and "unlike the boss candidate, I will know what I am talking about."[55]

State Commissioner of Education, James Allen, had been sitting on the sidelines during June and July but moved in decisively in August. The lethargy of the Board in taking action in the Theobald incident was amazing to Allen.

52. New York Times, July 27, 1961.
53. Herald Tribune, July 27, 1961.
54. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, July 27, 1961.
55. Ibid.

With outside pressure and inside dissension quickening, the Board strangely seemed more relaxed than ever. Allen, the authority the city school district is directly responsible to, met personally with Brooklyn District Attorney Koota. That meeting was symbolic in itself. It meant that the state decided to enter the picture and play a decisive, if not, primary role. It suggested that the seriousness of the situation called for legal action. Allen stated that he believed the facts presented in the Theobald incident were "sufficiently serious to warrant their being promptly brought to the attention of the New York City Board of Education for its consideration...."[56] Allen also subtly suggested that what was also at stake were the standards of propriety expected of the Superintendent. Apparently, he felt, deception by an authority figure set a poor example not only for the teachers but more importantly, the pupils in the city's schools.

Allen's actions began to build. Within a few days, he sent a letter to Silver and other Board members, in which he called "for the Board to step aside if it is unwilling or unable to restore order."[57] He went on further to direct the Board toward particular corrective steps to

56. New York Post, July 31, 1961.

57. Letter from James Allen to Charles Silver, August 3, 1961.

follow: (1) announce what steps it was taking to improve operation and management of the school system; (2) discharge publicly all persons guilty of wrongdoing; and (3) to take appropriate action to assure the public that the quality of instruction in the schools had not and would not suffer.[58]

He further suggested that the Board's time was running out and that in order to restore confidence in its operations those corrective steps would have to be taken immediately. He meant that quite literally for within a week the Board received a second "Dear Charles" letter stating that indeed the Board's time had run out and that the scene had to shift to the Albany Capitol. He announced he was asking the Governor to convene a special legislative session to deal with the problem. The solution would be three-fold: (a) to remove the present Board; (2) to appoint an interim board; (3) to change the method of selecting Board members.[59] Allen was no longer merely questioning the propriety of Theobald's actions. He was destroying the present Board and more importantly, destroying the mayor. For this legislative recommendation would take away from the mayor one of his chief powers in education, the selection and appointment of Board members.

58. Newton H. Fulbright, "Get Right or Get Out--State of the School Board," Herald Tribune, August 3, 1961.

59. Letter from James Allen to Charles Silver, August 10, 1961.

Mayor Wagner knew Rockefeller "had him on the ropes."[60] Neither the city's Preusse Report nor the state's Heald Report had been implemented, power positions at the Board were held by his closest friends and associates, John Theobald and Joseph Weiss. Corruption and graft permeated the situation. Rockefeller could easily walk away carrying the roses. Wagner knew that the political way to unseat your adversary was to upstage him. But how? He would employ his level two approach. Quietly he would assemble a group of distinguished educators and political advisers to discuss the situation. Alternatives would be advanced and discussed. Arguments would be had. Solutions would be arrived at after everyone had participated. Wagner would then make the final policy decision. Undoubtedly, knowing Wagner's avenues of access throughout the city and state, Rockefeller would be contacted and apprized generally of the mayor's forthcoming actions. Negotiations could take place privately if the Governor was interested. Generally, then, the master plan for the crisis would be arrived at on this level, away from the public glare or the questioning of some of the lesser, yet vocal, participants. Only after all lines had been tied would Wagner move openly, using level one.

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60. Interview with Henry Cohen, Deputy City Administrator, Wagner Administration, February 3, 1972.

Wagner went on television, prime time, to apprize the citizenry of what was happening. He informed them firstly that his policy had always been non-interference in school matters, after all "nobody wants a politician...to say what books should be read (or) what courses should be studied...."[61] This immediately allayed parents' fearsand took the ammunition "political interference" away from civic groups. However, he believed this to be a crisis situation in which he shared responsibility with the state. He urged the creation of a city-state commission of distinguished individuals, an educator, an administrator, an attorney, to lay out a specific program of action. He proposed three candidates: Henry Heald, Max Rubin and Charles Preusse, and asked the Governor to join him in solving this problem by naming three others. He suggested they study the question of decentralization, the revitalization of school boards, the question of the present Board, and the question of selection of future Board members. Wagner's actions looked positive and sincere - he had seized the situation, suggesting an inquiry panel of distinguished men and asked the Governor to join him. How could the Governor refuse?

The Governor refused quickly and easily. His refusal notwithstanding, Wagner's inquiry panel was established

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61. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, August 10, 1961.

and issued a report a few days later calling for the resignation of the Board and suggesting the creation of a screening panel of distinguished citizens to nominate candidates to the mayor for Board membership.[62] Certainly their suggestions and recommendations were nothing new, with the exception of the present Board's resignation. And by that time, that did not smack of newness either, for Commissioner Allen and the Legislature were calling for the same thing. What differentiated the two, however,was where the authority for selecting the new Board would be centered. The Legislature wanted Albany to have the power and the inquiry panel wanted it to remain with the mayor. The field then had been squared off--the prestige of the Commissioner of Education's Office coupled with the political power of the Governor and the Legislature against the mayor. Could the mayor's honorable panel, consisting of distinguished citizens, win out? That was the question. The mayor continued his upstaging. He called for the Board members' resignations. Again, he took the steam away from Albany.

Governor Nelson Rockefeller had remained relatively silent during June and July. His State Investigation Committee was faring quite well in exposing corruption in New York City's

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62. Letter from Charles Preusse, Henry Heald and Max Rubin to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, August 14, 1961. (Private Papers of Mayor Robert F. Wagner Administration, located at New York City's Municipal Archives Center.)

educational establishment. Few groups were negating the charges presented or rallying behind the Board or the mayor. If things continued along the same course, the Republicans might have a real chance to capture the City Hall seat. For a newly elected Republican Governor, in office merely three years, this would be a supreme victory, not only for the Party but for the man who saw Washington's chair as a not too distant goal. In fact, Rockefeller saw the pitch of anger increasing as time went on and felt undoubtedly that his golden opportunity for intervention came with Wagner's invitation to engage in a city-state inquiry panel. Seizing an activist role, he scorned the invitation, claiming "this is a time for action, not further study."[63] He continued to say that his brand of action meant the calling of an extraordinary session of the Legislature to "correct the fundamental structural weakness of the (educational) system."[64] This indeed was a grandstand play, calling a special session in the middle of August, when most assemblymen and senators were vacationing. Rockefeller must have felt he was on winning turf, for he knew, along with Wagner, that the mayor was on the ropes. However, he was quick to follow the successful Wagner stance toward educational policy-making in stating that he was intervening only because of the recommendations he had

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63. New York Times, August 12, 1961.

64. New York Post, August 11, 1961.

received from the state's authority -- the Education Commissioner. "I do not propose to interfere with action being taken by...Allen in discharge of his statutory responsibilities."[65] In calling for an extraordinary legislative session, the mandate was for the state's political officials to enact legislation pertaining to the structure, management, supervision and control of the city's schools."[66] It was pretty stringent legislation, for it removed almost entirely the role of the city leaders in education affairs by (a) stripping the mayor's office of unrestricted appointive power and setting up a 12-member advisory council to screen candidates for Board vacancies; (b) abolishing borough requirements and clearance from county political leaders before appointments; (c) authorizing the Board of Regents to name an interim Board; (d) providing for a reconstituted Board with power to raise and spend funds without political interference; (e) appropriating funds to prepare permanent legislation to create a new Board at the next legislative session and (f) revitalizing local boards to provide for effective participation by the community.[67]

The Governor's pronouncements were met with indignation in the city. Aside from the mayor's accusation of political grandstanding, civic leaders, good government

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65. Press Release, Office of the Governor, August 10, 1961.

66. New York Times, August 14, 1961.

67. New York Times, August 13, 1961.

groups, the UFT and the newspapers began to generate an orchestration melodious to Wagner's rather than Rockefeller's ears. Former Governor Herbert Lehman, a Democratic luminary, came to the forefront by claiming "to take away from this city of nearly 8 million people the right to conduct its own affairs would constitute unjustifiable interference by the state."[68] Bernard Baruch, another city luminary, told Rockefeller succinctly: "You let us alone--we'll run our own show."[69] Clearly one can see what was taking place. No longer was Wagner the center of focus, but the city was--all 8 million people. It went beyond the education arena, it became a question of the city's rights--home rule. The Citizens Committee for Children and the Public Education Association endorsed the recommendations of the mayor's inquiry panel and hit the home rule issue too.[70] Interestingly, the UFT, which only had "been keeping an eye on the situation"[71] attacked Rockefeller's special legislative session as "an invasion of local control,"[72] namely their control. Their chances for control in education seemed to increase greatly on August 11th when Wagner endorsed them as the sole bargaining agent for

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68. New York Times, August 16, 1961.

69. New York Times, August 19, 1961.

70. Letter from PEA President, William B. Nichols, to New York Times editors, August 15, 1961. (as appeared in New York Times, August 18, 1961.)

71. New York Post, August 4, 1961.

72. New York Post, August 14, 1961.

teachers and felt that as the new collective bargaining agent they should be represented on any advisory group...(to select Board members).[73] Indeed, they supported the mayor's inquiry panel with much vigor.

Newspaper editorials finally collapsed the Albany defenses. All agreed that the Board had to go but the method of "surrendering control...to upstate Republicans"[74] was anathema. They would not let it happen.

Board president, Charles Silver, appealed to the public in early August, discussing the school curriculum, programs and activities in the city's schools. He claimed they were superior. As to other administrative problems he set about in a lengthy letter-report to discuss the corrective steps taken.[75] He claimed that when these steps were taken, the schools too would be superior. He claimed the Board was "doing as good a job as is humanly possible."[76] But he stopped short of claiming the Board's superiority. With Allen's admonitions, Rockefeller's subsequent actions and the mayor's inquiry panel's recommendation which Wagner quickly announced he was pledged to enact, the outcome was inevitable--the Board's demise. Silver, however, kept saying "Let's not get too excited about this. It is a political year--everything is

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73. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, August 11, 1961.

74. New York Post, August 21, 1961.

75. Letter from Charles Silver to Public on City Schools Controversy, August 1, 1961.

76. New York Times, August 9, 1961.

tangled up in politics."[77] Indeed, he was right, it was a political year--but he made his mistake in not getting excited for the next day Wagner asked publicly for his resignation along with all other Board members.[78] Most acceded. They had to for no one would support their defenses.

Although the mayor seemed to be gaining on the Governor with his adroit upstaging, Wagner's adversaries, both regular Democrats and Republicans, were trying desparately to move the attention away from the home rule issue and back to Wagner. Levitt kept saying the situation was the result of the mayor's lack of action[79] and Lefkowitz, the Republican mayoralty candidate, saw the situation as a typical Wagner "fumbling" act.[80] The Assembly Democratic minority leader, Joseph Zaretski, too proclaimed his support of the Governor.

These last-ditch remarks were too late. Wagner had cut the inactive, fumbling criticism to ribbons, by handling the crisis decisively. Granted it was not his usual style, certainly not his style in education, but this time he had done it and done it cleverly. He had acted through a prestigious buffer agent, the inquiry panel, which was not tainted with political overtones. These were dedicated professionals. His approach then could not be attacked as

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77. New York Post, August 14, 1961.
78. Herald Tribune, August 15, 1961
79. New York Post, August 22, 1961.
80. Ibid.

heavy-handed political hatcheting but as a sensible approach to a serious problem. Removing himself from central focus, the home rule issue could masterfully be employed. It was.

The Governor had only one option open - to retreat. To save face, he juggled the situation and came out with revised legislation, which in substance merely endorsed the inquiry panel's recommendations. Wagner agreed to accept the proposed legislation. The legislature agreed overwhelmingly too. The vote was 57-0 in the Senate and 137-7 in the Assembly. The seven dissenters were simply die-hard Levitt supporters. Wagner then had won, not just with the educational legislation at the State Capitol which was an unprecedented victory in itself, not just on the home rule issue for the city, but for him, most importantly, on the political front--DeSapio and the Rockefeller-Lefkowitz forces were crushed. The mayoralty would be his for the asking that November. Ironically, the very issue or crisis that seemed a possibility for defeating him in June and July was turned into an advantageous situation.

In this crisis, it is evident that Wagner sought solutions on two different levels. Indeed in the very beginning of the crisis, given the pressure of the political climate and the severity of the charges lodged, especially against people close to him, he departed from his usual level two style of activity in the educational arena and directly

intervened, calling for the Board to take charge, calling for the suspension of employees who were allegedly accused of having taken bribes, and calling for the transference of the school construction program from the school authorities to the city. Because of his level one approach, which was unexpected and perhaps too quick, he failed--the Board did not take immediate action to set its house in order; Theobald did not suspend the 32 school employees; and the proposal to transfer the construction department from Board to city control was met by strong opposition immediately, from the bureaucracy, the Board and civic groups.

Wagner saw that his quick, direct overt method had not been effective in forming policy. He knew that this education crisis would continue to blossom and because of the corruption issue, be sensationalized. He also knew that his political career depended to a large extent on how he handled this corruption scandal.

His succeeding actions thus changed. With an unique level two-level one combination approach, his tactics would call for the creation of a buffer agent, a group of prestige, non-political men, acceptable to the civic groups, the middle-class, parents, political participants and the educational establishment.[81] This agent would be the spokes-

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81. Interview with Warren Moscow, Executive Assistant to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Wagner Administration, February 11, 1971.

man for Wagner for he knew these men's opinions and how they would react to the given crisis. He had worked with them before. He met with them, discussed the situation, knew their thinking.[82] He had nothing to worry about, he was thus secure in knowing what he would have to do. Interestingly, it was what he knew had to be done before but knew his directives would be met with hostility--ask the Board to resign in toto and create a screening panel to make non-partisan recommendations of Board members for mayoralty selection. It gave him the power to continue making appointments and left budgetary and innovative functions in the city's hands. In addition, it would remove a Board that had more Tammany backers than Wagner supporters. There would be no usurpation of the mayor's power.

No one could thus cry political maneuvering or interference on the mayor's part. The issue that could come forth was a wider, more serious issue for the entire city--invasion of home rule by the state. With prestigious statesmen supporting the city, the state would be put on the defensive, on an issue not of their making. It was literally changing the plot and thus the heroes in the middle of the script.

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82. Interview with Max Rubin, Educational Expert and Adviser, Mayor Robert F. Wagner Administration, February 11, 1971.

Wagner was able successfully to change the script without the state being able to cry "false move." All they could do politically was to revise the legislation to conform to the Wagner policy as articulated through the inquiry panel. Thus Wagner could say forcefully at the end of the legislative session:

> ...(the) bill was in line with what I first proposed some time ago--it leaves control of the future of education in this city up to us here in the city.[83]

The applause was registered firstly by the media, then through the primary vote and finally through the November general election. The indirect-direct approach had worked.

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83. New York Times, August 22, 1961.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN V. LINDSAY - THE MAN

> Some people's community is themselves, others their family, others will be General Electric, others their law firms, others go beyond that into the state. That's for me. I think I always wanted public life.
>
> John V. Lindsay

The White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture traditionally has imbued its sons with the necessity of service to society. It was an earnestly felt obligation. That service was manifested in various forms during the history of America, but it must be acknowledged that public life, the calling to preserve and protect the public interest, was the highest calling for many. It was the arena that captivated competitive, aggressive men who enthusiastically wanted to share in decision-making, problem-solving and policy-shaping. It seemed to be an arena for dramatic action.

WASP sons trained for this arena, however, in a rather purified atmosphere. They trained for their calling traditionally among their peers at prestige preparatory and Ivy League schools and came early to believe that Plunkitt's

honest graft theory--"I seen my opportunities and I took 'em"[1] was repugnant to their view of politics. Their colleagues continuously reinforced that belief. As a direct result, an alliance with political party machinery was more often than not tenuous and their mandate, at least as they saw it, was to seek reform in government by throwing those corrupt Plunkitt rascals out of the seats of power. Instead, they would fill those seats with men dedicated to protecting every man's rights. The society would thus be the sole beneficiary.

As an idea, the WASP sons' philosophy was unbeatable, but as a practical matter, the son quite frequently either lost at the polling both or lost the battle early on, as the elected official, because of his unfamiliarity with the actions and motives of many of the political participants or the party machinery. Hence, the insurgent usually lasted a short time and accomplished little. Reform movements were more often than not exercises in frustration. By the 1950's both the WASP philosophy and the shape of reform movements had changed drastically. The WASP son no longer saw public service as an obligation or necessity and reform movements no longer sought to remove corrupt officials from office but to remove bad political leaders from the Party.

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1. William L. Riordon (recorded by), Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1963), p. 3.

For New York City in particular, frustrated reformation usually has been fact rather than fiction. Since the consolidation of the city at the turn of the century, reform candidates, running on a fusion or coalition platform, have rarely been elected and if elected have served rather short and uneventful terms. Perhaps the one exception has been Fiorello LaGuardia, a fusion mayor for 12 years. But as discussed in an early chapter, he was a rather sui generis candidate, non-WASP, non-Ivy League, thoroughly steeped in the practical and political worlds of both Washington and New York.

Why then would John V. Lindsay, the WASP son, the reform-oriented Republican, opt for the political community rather than the comfort of his profession? He knew that New York City neither welcomed reformers nor Republicans. How could one be successful losing political contests? Success was something he was quite familiar with, not failure. His life began pleasantly enough on the West side of Manhattan in 1921 and as his father succeeded in the investment business the family succeeded in New York society, first moving to the East side of Manhattan, Park Avenue to be exact, then to such prominent schools as Buckley, St. Paul's and Yale. Sports for the five children played an extremely important part in their younger years and they

usually walked off with the prizes and trophies in that arena. John, in particular, seemed to move out front and showed leadership ability, serving as president of his preparatory school class and then securing a much sought after pageboy job at the 1940 Republican convention. Law school, after college and military service, succeeded in placing him in a New York prestigious law firm. The Lindsay litany of success always seemed to ring out clearly. Why then seek an alien community that promised none of this?

There is no easy answer to explain anyone's life, but perhaps the shine of success became dulled if not drab in the arena Lindsay had been operating in. Perhaps too there was a new strong-father type that began to influence him. After all, a political home, or politician-relative was non-existent for Lindsay. His father was a self-made man, a wealthy investment banker, who understood best the financial community. Success was measured in financial rather than political terms. Thus although success was important to both John Lindsay and his father, they undoubtedly defined it in different ways and probably communicated less and less with each other as the young son grew into maturity. The void was filled quickly by Bethuel Webster, a landmark of New York politics and the senior partner of Lindsay's law firm. Undoubtedly, Webster watched a restless, ambitious young man, articulate and aggressive. He saw Lindsay choose

and excell in the less attractive, non-revenue producing area of law--litigation. It was indicative of the Lindsay style, action, drama, contest in a legal forum. He quickly admitted his fascination with trial work and attributed his success with it to hereditary factors, for his mother was an actress before her marriage, playing summer stock and local theater. He went even further at times, acknowledging that he was "the greatest ham in the world."[2] Webster continued to watch his young partner and queried him on his politics. Lindsay professed strong Republican affiliation, seeing Lincoln as the consummate Republican, one who "lifted each man out of the heap and gave him a sense of belonging to something bigger than his immediate station...."[3] On reflection, that philosophy offered a promise to each man, a promise of self-respect, of dignity, of freedom. Thus government's function was to protect each man's worth, by not infringing upon his essential liberties.

In more real terms, Lindsay cites an incident in his early years--a trip to New York's City Hall where he met with LaGuardia, a hero figure for most young boys at the time. He has said: "It was quite natural for me to become a Republican. He (LaGuardia) was with the good guys and

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2. New York Times, August 2, 1960.

3. John V. Lindsay, Journey into Politics (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967), p. 114.

and fighting the bad guys--Tammany Hall."[4] That sharp dichotomy was to stay with him for many years, even into his own City Hall administration.

Webster queried him on his future plans, dreams and goals and emphasized that "each man must follow his own star"[5] -- something that Lindsay would remember time and again. Even though the star was still unknown, the young partner was often at Webster's elbow at Republican functions. He soon was the president of the New York Young Republican Club and helped found Youth for Eisenhower. That activity was later to introduce him to Washington in 1955 through the Department of Justice. He returned to New York and Webster's tutelage two years later, just in time to engage in a primary fight for Manhattan's 17th Congressional District.

The 17th was probably the only district where he would have any chance of success at the polls--and even that chance would be slim. For this district of 400,000 was an unbelievable amalgam of contrasts. It ran about 100 blocks on Manhattan's East side, starting in Greenwich Village and ending near Harlem. It included the garment district and Central Park on the West, and although nicknamed the

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4. Daniel E. Button, Lindsay: A Man for Tomorrow (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 17.

5. Lindsay, op. cit., p. 11.

"Silk Stocking District" because many of its constituents lived on Fifth, Madison and Park Avenues, it included parts of El Barrio, Spanish Harlem and the Lower East Side. Within the confines of this district lived the most glamorous, the most articulate, the most erudite and successful in Manhattan but also the poorest, most newly-arrived immigrant groups. In party registration it was largely Democratic, yet traditionally voted independently.[6] It usually selected bright, professional, well-known representatives. In 1958 the district had not changed radically through reapportionment but it had barely elected a Republican last time and considering the fact that it was the last Republican-held Congressional District in Manhattan, it was considered an important one. The Republican hierarchy knew the possible danger of losing it and wanted a regular, a party man, to run for the seat. Lindsay was not their choice. But he knew he wanted a political life, that he wanted to be part of the Washington arena. He, with Webster's blessings, declared his candidacy and entered the primary fight as an insurgent, a reformer, battling the old-time conservative GOP machine. He found the fight difficult, he was by-and-large unknown in the district, the odds were against him and people questioned his motives when he rang doorbells. He merely recounted that he had this "terribly pressing urge to be where the action was. While the world

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6. Barbara Carter, The Road to City Hall (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 110; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 8.

and events moved all around us, I, and many of my friends, did not intend to be left behind."[7]

In order to be up front, Lindsay's campaign tactics were to concentrate on the need for new leadership, unfettered by the existing party officials. He offered to protest the status quo both in New York and Washington and to be an independent thinker, a credit to his constituency.[8] It was in fact a device used to flatter and cajole a large segment of his erudite constituency. As weeks went by he successfully got his message across, a knight errant, a crusader, who would follow his conscience, who would decide between good and evil, between right and wrong.[9] The voters on a warm August day, gave Lindsay the green light by a 3-to-2 margin. He went on to defeat his Democartic adversary that year by about 8,000 votes and to embark on a Congressional career.

The Congressional journey started in the Burkeian tradition--an independent Congressman, devoted to uphold the wishes of the electorate, as he perceived them. He believed strongly what Edmund Burke had told his constituency in England in 1774: "You choose a member indeed but when you have chosen him, he is not a member for Bristol; he is a

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7. Lindsay, op. cit., p. 4.

8. Casper Citron, John V. Lindsay (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1965), p. 65.

9. Nat Hentoff, A Political Life: The Education of John V. Lindsay (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 50.

member of Parliment ."[10] The Seventeenth encouraged this kind of representation, a bright, articulate, confident independent Lindsay would astound the Republican leadership often with his unorthodox actions and his usual retort would be "I represent brains,"[11] therefore, somehow exonerating himself from not voting with his Party. Such action seemed to convey the fact that Republican congressmen were merely political robots who voted as the leadership directed them. He was different and proudly proclaimed it. Party members, let alone leaders, did not enjoy hearing these remarks.

Lindsay further explained his voting patterns by declaring that his district wanted a leader, not a lamb, and he was about to give them that. Lindsay, the idealist, the reformer, the independent, would find the going, however, exceedingly rough in Congress, meeting all kinds of political men, with motives, goals, interests, different from his own. He was no longer solely among the WASP sons in secluded schools. He was not succeeding with his colleagues. His early days on Capitol Hill then must have been quite depressing for he would wish that Congress were a better place, one where its members could "stand up to the white marble"[12] that

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10. Ibid., p. 69.

11. Carter, op. cit., p. 17.

12. Hentoff, op. cit., p. 49.

surrounded them. He was intent upon matching that marble for it was pure, strong and unyielding and seemed to represent the grandeur of man -- a being intent on doing through his acts and deeds all that was noble and righteous. Indeed, his Congressional career seemed to be an obvious effort in that regard.

It dramatically started 20 days into the first session. He committed the two cardinal errors of the House in those days: one was to speak up as a freshman legislator and the second was to criticize a senior Congressman, especially if he were your Party's man. Lindsay did both in one step. The Supreme Court was under attack as a Socialist instrument. That was something that Lindsay denied vehemently and no matter what the motivations of the attacker might be, Lindsay would have no part of it. He challenged the senior member's statements and proceeded skillfully to defend the probity of the Court.[13] That was merely the beginning. After being assigned to the Judiciary Committee, he entered the civil rights legislative battles and voted more often with the Democratic Party than with his own, trying to secure strong civil rights legislation. With his Wednesday Club colleagues (a group of the most liberal Republican Congressmen informally ostracized from their own Party's favor because they had voted to expand the House Rules Committee in an effort to push Kennedy legislation through

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13. New York Post, October 26, 1965.

the maze of Congress) he managed to help draft and get passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act,[14] to protect the rights of minorities at polling booths and in public accommodations and facilities. It was and has continued to be a theme that Lindsay has stressed throughout his elective career--each individual's rights and privileges must be acknowledged and protected.

In line with his interests in guaranteeing the rights of all people, he came to believe that education was a necessary ingredient in insuring equality. In a Congressional statement regarding the federal budget he was reported as saying "...educate people and that's half the battle. It shows them how to help themselves. It opens vistas to people. The area of worst unemployment is always the same as the most poorly-educated areas. People don't realize that education is just a sliver of the federal budget."[15] Education became his top priority when he accepted the stewardship of New York City years later.

The 17th seemed to be charged by Lindsay's Congressional activities and as he alienated the Washington politicians, he encouraged his constituents--each term, 1960, 1962 and 1964 he saw his political stock going up in the district. His campaigning tactics were always centered on his independence, his idealism, his activities to keep corruption

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14. Carter, op. cit., p. 113.

15. Herald Tribune, June 30, 1963.

out of politics. His adversary then was never a "real reform"[16] politician. He downplayed his Republican affiliation more often than not, and at times jokingly stated: "I am a Republican, but don't hold it against me."[17] His constituents didn't, but the Party regulars took note and later would. Rockefeller, Governor of New York and head of the Republican Party in the State, reflected: "One of the most important things I've learned in politics, is that voters react to you intuitively...they can tell pretty accurately what kind of a man you are, even if they've never looked at your voting record. And that's the important thing John has going for him...they can feel his independence."[18] So too could the Governor.

His independence as years progressed began to cost him a great deal. In order to stand up to the white marble, Lindsay felt uncomfortable standing next to his Party regulars more and more often. The minority leader, Charles Halleck, roared at one point, "Goddam it, I'm the Republican leader. Of course I want to win. And there are times when Lindsay stands almost alone out there against us."[19]

As time went on the realities of the political

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16. Citron, op. cit., p. 87.
17. Button, op. cit., p. 39.
18. Hentoff, op. cit., p. 42.
19. Ibid., p. 41.

forum began to take their toll. When Lindsay needed their vote, little or no support came from his Party. Democrats could neither be seen nor heard. In his own mind Lindsay knew: "I am sufficiently independent to have come close to the edge of being ineffective."[20] He would have to move on if he did not want to be left behind. He would have to learn the realities of the political forum if he were not to come close to the edge of being ineffective again.

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20. Carter, op. cit., p. 116.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN V. LINDSAY - THE MAYOR

> ...we will win our way through to freedom if we can help each other recognize a common aim that unites all men....
>
> Favorite Passage of
> John V. Lindsay, from
> St. Exupery, A Sense of Life

In order not to be left behind, Lindsay began to test the political winds in his own state. The governorship was not vacant and the Senate seats were untouchable. The one possibility was the mayoralty. Wagner, the three-term Democratic mayor was weary and worn out. Although he did not close the door for a fourth term, the possibilities for mounting another campaign without the Democratic organization behind him would be slim. Unsure of Wagner's future course, however, no attractive Republican candidate was willing to be a scapegoat.

Lindsay in May of 1965 decided to make a stab at it. In a town with 2,400,000 registered Democrats, a mere 700,000 registered Republicans and about 60,000 Liberal voters, he knew he would never make it on the Republican line alone. His strategy would be that which he developed in the

17th - sell yourself, not your party-line. He cultivated actively the Liberal Party endorsement, placing New York University professor and Liberal Party bigwig, Timothy Costello, on his ticket as the City Council president candidate. To complete his fusion ticket he selected a Democrat, a Wagner administration regular, Milton Mollen, as the candidate for Controller. He enlisted scores of youths to man neighborhood storefronts and built up his own organization for block-by-block campaigning. He would enlist minority groups, groups newly mobilized by federal anti-poverty funds and newly introduced to politics, to carry his Lincolnian banner. The other part of his well-rehearsed strategy was to adopt the reformish platform--turn the rascals out of City Hall. It was, however, couched in more sophisticated decorous language. The city was in crisis, it was time for change. The change would encompass in Lindsay's political speeches the "ripping down of the cruddy slums in this town, the cleaning up of filthy streets."[1] He would envision his goals as "high goals (ones that) will require brains, action, sweat, talent and muscle."[2] He challenged the populace--either they stayed with the machine, the same old cozy clubhouse crowd, or they moved with independent, unattached young leadership eager to build a Utopia. "It's now or never--the last chance in your lifetime," he exclaimed repeatedly. "We are witnessing

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1. Time, November 12, 1965, p.28.

2. Ibid.

the decline and fall of New York City. We are at the cross-roads. This is the test. Either we meet it or we don't... there is no party behind us, no organization, no machine, nothing between us and the people."[3]

The position papers were many, and on the whole well-developed and well-written. They fired the imagination of not only the brains of the 17th Congressional District in Manhattan, but seemed to offer each voting bloc something beneficial. Basically, the elements for curing the crisis of the city Lindsay-style were two-fold: humanize the government so that each and every individual would have an opportunity to be heard. Lincolnian-Republicanism would echo throughout the streets of Harlem and Bedford-Styvesant. The other side of the coin involved the reorganization of governmental structure, to untangle the bureaucratic tape that seemed to strangle everyone, even the bureaucrats; to bring together in 10 superagencies the functions, duties and responsibilities of almost 50 separate departments and agencies. Hopefully, Lindsay saw such a plan as a way to facilitate the planning of major programs for the cities before crises caused inflamed feelings and brought about riots.[4] Leadership over these changes was of course an essential element. Lindsay would thus offer a fresh approach while everyone else was tired, or so his advancemen's posters would read.

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3. Carter, op. cit., p. 100.

4. Lindsay, op. cit., pp. 136-42.

The city populace turned out in November to cast their vote for the man who would save their city. That man, on a fusion ticket, beat out the Democratic organization candidate, Abraham Beame,by over 100,000 votes. A breakdown of the voting profile showed that Lindsay captured over 75% of his own Party's vote, along with about 42% of the black vote and 43% of the Jewish vote.[5] These were large percentages from groups that traditionally voted solidly Democratic. These statistics, proved more and more interesting as time past, for Lindsay realized that the two groups that had elected him were pretty well even in support. When a confrontation between his black and Jewish constituencies ensued three years later, it would be difficult to take sides. Politically he would lose either way. But that was an unknown in 1965 and at a gala inaugural ball one aide would wisely quip: "Congratulations, John. You have only yourself to blame."[6]

A mere few days into January, John Lindsay faced Michael Quill, labor giant, head of the Transit Workers Union, and saw the Wagnerian past. Mike Quill stared at Lindsay and saw the WASP son. A standoff ensued. The independent, the man who believed that it was necessary to stand up to the white marble, had met his adversary, labor, early on in New York City. He denounced these men as power brokers, men

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5. Time, op. cit., p. 28.

6. Nat Hentoff, "The Mayor," The New Yorker, October 7, 1967, p. 79.

solely concerned with their own interests, not the community at large, not men in search of St. Exupery's common aim that unitesall men, but brokers entering City Hall through the back door. He would close that door, quickly and loudly by public denunciation. He made it a question of morality, the good guys against the bad ones. He was terribly earnest and only after two weeks of weary walking, traffic jams and millions of dollars lost would he begin to realize that New York City politics could not be changed overnight, that a power center could only be dealt with with power strong enough to challenge it, that a mayor could only assume a center-stage position, be an initator, if he had the tools necessary to ply and manipulate and build. One could never close a door unless he was sure he could open another one, one heavier, more solid, more supportive. A reform mayor could never be sure of that unless he carefully planned, determined in advance his allies and adversaries, built up a strong supportive coalition. Only in this way would he survive, otherwise he would go the way of all reformers--out of the political picture quickly and quietly. He could not afford to be an idealist, he would have to become a practical man--to do what was possible, to compromise, to be less independent, to build fences, to look less and less at the white marble--to be effective.

As a Wagner aide reflected, Lindsay and his youthful followers felt that "if you're intelligent and your heart

is in the right place, all you have to do is take over and there'll be change."[7] In explaining their innocence, he remembered that when they first came in, they didn't even know where the light switch was. He emphasized: "They literally didn't know how to turn on the lights."[8] One can only assume that the Quill encounter steered them toward the on-off switch. It would take a longer period of time to light up the room.

One corner of the room that had been perceived by Lindsay as needing light was the field of education. Back in his Congressional days, he saw the potential of education for eliminating huge welfare and unemployment problems. He saw it as a panacea for New York City and pledged during his campaign to make education his top priority. In a 1965 campaign white paper on education, he reiterated ideas and programs not novel or clever for many of them had knocked around the academic corridors and even 110 Livingston Street before. But what was new, indeed novel, was his avowed stance to take on the educational bureaucracy--his commitment.[9]

> For 15 years every study of our educational system has proclaimed the liabilities of our rigid, overcentralized bureaucracy. 110 Livingston Street, Booklyn, home of the Board of Education,

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7. Nat Hentoff, "The Mayor," The New Yorker, October 14, 1967, p. 77.

8. Ibid.

9. Interview with Robert Sweet, Deputy Mayor, Mayor J. V. Lindsay Administration, February 5, 1970.

> has become the symbol across the country of an administration almost totally divorced from the schools for which it is responsible.... I favor any decentralization which will improve the quality of our schools, give individual teachers and schools freedom to experiment, while at the same time maintaining and increasing standards...and bring a sense of adventure and excitement to our system.[10]

A candidate for mayor might suggest that education needed more money or more qualified Board members, but never did a mayor inject himself directly into the education arena--criticizing it outright and pledging directly to do something about it. But the city was ready. Not only minorities but middle-class white Queens mothers seemed dissatisifed with the city's education system and welcomed some change. The idea of a young, energetic city leader saying all the things about educational failure that the citizenry and the marketplace thought, was indeed exciting and caused many to join his election bandwagon. Certainly their mandate would help him swing open the education doors. Thus his reform activities in education would focus on reorganizing "an archaic staff structure which had the responsibility for supplying basic educational services"[11] by making them accountable for their monetary allocation and broadening the

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10. Memorandum for Hon. John V. Lindsay from the Board of Education of the City of New York - Comments on Your White Paper on Education (New York: Board of Education, November 19, 1965)

11. John Lindsay, The City (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1970), p. 111.

Board of Education's representation. Also, Lindsay felt the education empire was too closed, too insulated to meet the needs of the citizenry. New voices coupled with City Hall guidance would be two essential ingredients to make the education recipe edible.

Lindsay started quickly to execute his plans. He appeared in April of 1966 at a coordinating committee of the Public Education Association, that citizen's watchdog group that had openly supported his candidacy. In discussing finances, Lindsay let it be known that he did not favor Wagner's 1963 magnanimity to the Board in granting it control of its own budget. The new mayor felt that "unavoidably as the city's highest elected official and as a man who signs the vast education budgets--the mayor is responsible for how well the educational system is performing its functions."[12] He went on further to alert PEA and other education groups that the mayor saw his role as a strong, forceful one that "to participate effectively in decisions (of specific educational programs)...the specific plans, costs and time required for implementation must be known."[13] The education bureaucracy was thrown on the defensive immediately and its intransigence quickened when Lindsay's adviser on education, Donald Elliott,

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12. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, April 29, 1966.

13. Ibid.

an attorney and Manhattan political leader, claimed that "...if one program isn't working, we have the right to say that no more money ought to be allocated next time for that."[14] In effect, the mayor's heavy hand declared war. The Board was to be made accountable to City Hall. He was not going to acknowledge cries of political interference, or so he thought.

His aides never realized that education was one area in New York City politics in which one moved slowly, cautiously and methodically, built up an alliance of as many different communities as possible before moving in any direction, let alone a forceful direction of reform. Even though complaints and distress were registered frequently by parents, teachers, students and citizen groups about the plight of urban education, strong-arm political solutions were usually vehemently opposed, even though the outcome of such a political solution might meet the critics' complaints more than half way.

In addition, it had to be judicious. Lindsay was beginning to understand that right and wrong and good and bad guys were not squared off as neatly as he had originally thought and that sometimes the labor man, the supposed bad guy, would be the only one who could execute a "right" action. Illustrative of his new knowledge was an episode recounted to a political reporter by Lindsay: It concerned the filming

14. Hentoff, "The Mayor," October 7, 1967, op. cit., p. 121.

of the movie Up the Down Staircase. The film director shooting in New York wanted the use of a city school building for location. It was during the summer months when the schools were mainly closed. The Board received the request and said it would probably take months to be decided upon, i.e. getting clearance, choosing the particular school, alerting custodial staff and the like. In addition, the Board felt the picture might afford poor public relations for the school system, painting an inept school, teachers, etc. 110 Livingston Street stalled. No action, let alone decision, was forthcoming. The motion picture company petitioned the mayor, stating that the hold-up was causing delays in its production, increasing costs and discouraging other film-makers from using New York City as a shooting location, which, of course, meant losing jobs for lighting men, camera men, sound men and other union members. Lindsay decided to by-pass the usual steps of having an aide follow through on the matter and called Morris Iushewitz personally. Iushewitz was a board member, but more pointedly a labor official. After introductory pleasantries, Lindsay discussed the situation and stated: "Do you realize that you're losing a million dollars in jobs by taking this stuffy attitude? How would you like to see that in the papers, Moe? Moe quickly saw the light and pledged his support. He delivered the rest of the Board in a matter of days and before very long the camera crews were ensconced in a city school

for shooting.[15] One broker challenged the other with sufficient power to tilt the scale. No moral issue was espoused. No stand-off resulted. Lindsay seemed now to be able to understand the game--no white marble was in sight.

By the following year, 1967, Lindsay was back at the Public Education Association. This time he opened his address by declaring that he neither wanted to run New York City's school system nor seek to influence or control teachers or administrators or staff members. In essence he stated unambiguously that he had no desire to involve city government in the administration of the public school system.[16]

His reform strategies then would be through mechanisms not directly based at City Hall. One would be the encouragement of the Office of Economic Opportunity's community action programs as they related to the school system, another would be the push for community participation in school decision-making on a local level and another would be the advancing of a new concept in budgeting for education.

Transplanted from Washington where it had proved so successful in McNamara's Defense Department, PPBS (planning, programming, budgeting system) started to sprout in New York City's agencies. Lindsay had called for the introduction of

15. Hentoff, "The Mayor," October 14, 1967, op. cit., p. 64.
16. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, April 27, 1967.

this system into all municipal agencies and detailed it in the proposal for one of his superagencies. In essence, this budgeting system called for a more efficient allocation of resources among competing demands. Its basic difference from traditional planning procedures was that it focused upon outputs of an organization rather than their inputs.[17]

The Board of Education in 1967 announced its plan for the development of such a system to coincide with the other city agencies' budgets as presented to the Budget Bureau. The impact of PPBS in an area such as education, the mayor hoped, would provide better accountability and guidance in policy-making, for the outputs that the school system would have to consider and concentrate on would be instructional programs and curricular activities.[18]

To implement this system, the Board first set about to have a study conducted by an outside research organization to determine the merits of PPBS and to develop a plan for installing it. In addition, the Superintendent's 1966-67 budget provided for the establishment of a budget analysis unit to evaluate programs in an effort to determine the efficiency of the school system's output.[19] As the reports came in, it became obvious that PPBS would be a

17. Harry J. Hartley, Educational Planning, Programming, Budgeting (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 111.
18. Ibid., p. 120.
19. Ibid.

complicated change-over, in effect, asking separate and distinct units of a large bureaucracy to delegate some of their powers and responsibilities over program development, planning administration and the like to other units and persons. Thus certain elements of budget formulation would change -- new groups would have authority and power to persuade former power holders: new coalitions would develop to both coerce and compromise. Undoubtedly, some members of the educational power structure would view such a new system as an infringement of their position and standing. They would not support it. Thus, although the deputy superintendents and assistant superintendents at 110 Livingston would publicly commend the merits of such a system as advocated by the mayor, they would in reality sabotage PPBS internally. It would die a quick and painless bureaucratic death.

Luckily, Lindsay did not put all his reform eggs in a PPBS basket--realizing the slowness and lack of enthusiasm of introducing a new budgeting system, he began discussing another of his reform strategies--decentralization. In petitioning the state legislature for more money for schools, Lindsay's aides had adopted a novel plan that had been developed by a Wagner commission a few years earlier: divide the New York City school district into separate borough districts,

much like the upstate school districts. The results would be more community interest and participation in school affairs, especially among the discontented minority groups, and more state aid, for according to the allocation formula, dividing the New York City districts into separate units, would yield extra dollars. The legislature bought the idea and instructed the mayor to conduct a study for fostering community participation in schools and to report by the end of the year his findings and policy suggestions.[20]

Lindsay assured the education community, through his PEA address, that his plan would not be drawn up in isolation, that he intended to work with the Board of Education and the community at large. He was trying his hand at creating an alliance. The Board, through its president, showed interest in the idea of decentralization and accepted membership on the mayor's study panel. Community groups and parents also endorsed the idea. It seemed as if this reform strategy might work. Time would tell.

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20. McKinney's Sessions Law, Education Vol. #16, Sec. 484, (1967).
Interview with New York State Senator John Marchi, July 21, 1970.

CHAPTER IX

THE OCEAN HILL-BROWNSVILLE CRISIS

> No matter how many asbestos walls are
> put between me and the Board of Education,
> at the end I get the blame if there's trouble,
> and I bloodly well ought to have something
> to say about what's going on.
>
> John V. Lindsay as told
> to Nat Hentoff

The Board of Education was not about to remove any asbestos walls, especially for a mayor like John Lindsay. It took them years to construct those fireproof boundaries and if any flames were to flare, 110 Livingston Street would not be the site of the fire. They would make sure of that. City Hall, maybe.

Lindsay, without fire extinguisher, hose or watering can, marched straight into the blaze. His political education failed - he moralized the situation again. Now it was his audience versus his constituency.

Traditionally, according to political scientist James Wilson these two groups were viewed as nearly the same by an urban mayor, for up until the 1950's a mayor had basically two needs for election and re-election, money to run a campaign which he secured from his audience and people

to vote for him--his constituency. City interests supplied financial backing and the Party and the citizenry generally supplied votes. The interests of both groups were intertwined nicely and a mayor had little difficulty in accommodating them. However, with the out-migration of large percentages of the middle-class to suburban communities, financial resources shrivelled fast. The political machine was shrivelling too and offered little support and few workers. Mayors had to look for other ways to get money and people. Thus his audience-constituency combination became dichotomized. He looked to those who still by and large had large financial investments in the city but no longer lived there. Although they were non-residents they were interested in protecting and capitalizing on their businesses, property and other interests. They sought then through programs and issues--urban redevelopment being one of the first--to accomplish their goals. They got funds and resources from federal agencies, foundations and research aid, planners and other professional talent from universities and urban think tanks and news coverage from the mass media. They became "those persons whose favorable attitudes and responses the mayor (was) most interested in, those persons from whom he (received) his most welcome applause and his most needed resources and opportunities."[1] Thus the

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1. James Q. Wilson, "The Mayors vs. The Cities," The Public Interest, #16 (Summer, 1969), p. 28.

audience emerged with special interests and favors. The mayor, in currying them and listening to their advice, got from them money, highly talented people, state-wide, if not national news coverage, issues, position papers and support, but no election votes.

His constituency, on the other hand, represented "those people who could vote for or against him in an election."[2] This group included minorities, but the greater percentage were working class, or newly arrived middle-class civil servants, whose prime interests and values were grounded in the stability and order of the bureaucracy, in protecting and preserving their narrowly-defined neighborhood interests, and in their pleas to hold down taxes and beef up services.[3]

The WASP son could only see small materialistic money-eager motives from this segment of his constituency and that he equated with what was wrong with the city generally -- protection of private interests over the good of the larger community. It could only be saved from further crisis if this constitutency equated their interests with the public good. How else could Utopia be achieved? In reality he was asking a tremendous amount of a group that had much to lose. Lindsay could notcomprehend that or so it seemed.[4] They were

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2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp. 25-37.

4. Roger Starr, "John V. Lindsay: A Political Portrait," Commentary, #2 (February, 1970), pp. 25-46.

merely the bad guys intent on suppressing minority interests.

Because of WASP insularity, myopic vision or misunderstanding, he dismissed this part of his constituency and concentrated his efforts on following the directives of his audience. Those directives took two important routes: the first centered on the possibilities of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which specified that community action programs should be "developed, conducted and administered with "maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served."[5]

Those possibilities seemed limitless, considering the funding offered and the flexibility envisioned. Perhaps the economically-deprived areas could combat their victimization by the urban city by controlling their own environment. That would mean planning, programming and leading their communities in fields such as education, health and employment. They could gather enough power and political influence to either meet the demands of middle-class society or seek to change the demands. It seemed clear enough and easy enough. Only it didn't work. It didn't work because it was not easy to plan, or program, or lead until you knew how to ask questions, then what questions to ask, and then how to answer them. The ghetto didn't know where to actually begin and the Lindsay

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5. Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Title II, Part A, Sec. 202(a)(3), A Compendium of Federal Education Laws (Wash., D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 397.

audience really didn't know how to help them. It was not only happening in the ghetto, City Hall too was facing the same problem. Bob Sweet, Lindsay's Deputy Mayor, told a reporter a year after the inauguration: "The name of the game here is to find out what the hell the questions are. We kept saying that New York can be governed and made a better place to live in, but once we got in here we had to find the right questions to begin organizing around."[6]

In addition to trying to find the right questions, the minorities were trying to find leaders for their community action programs. Militants accused middle-of-the roaders of Uncle Tomism and conservatives saw militancy as self-serving. It was concluded that it was "often easier to organize groups to oppose, complain, demonstrate and boycott, than develop and run programs."[7]

The Lindsay audience saw frustrations increasing with this route and no likelihood of abatement.

The second route, as discussed somewhat earlier, was to latch on to the state legislature's mandate for a study of the educational system. The Lindsay audience saw it as a possible solution to urban unrest and discontent. Lindsay

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6. Hentoff, "The Mayor," October 14, 1967, op. cit., p. 72.

7. Otto Kerner, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), pp. 296-97.

commissioned a prime member of the audience, McGeorge Bundy of the Ford Foundation, to head the study. In addition, he appointed Francis Keppel, former Harvard Dean of Education and former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Alfred A. Giardino, president of the Board of Education, Mitchell Sviridoff, Benetta Washington and Antonia Pantoja. They in turn selected Ford Foundation personnel to coordinate the activities and invite community organizations and citizens to lend their thoughts and viewpoints toward shaping a plan.

In transmitting their 100-page report to the mayor in November of 1967 the Bundy study panel stated that their findings led to one major conclusion: "...that major change is needed."[8] That major change took the form of a school system with strong community participation.

A plan for change, redistribution of power and influence, is one thing on paper, it is quite another when actualized. The audience was eager, the constituency frightened.

While the Bundy panel was working diligently on its report, some of its staff members, Ford Foundation employees, had become involved in working with local groups in certain sections of the city to establish experimental community school projects, whereby parents could have a legitimate opportunity to participate in the planning, programming

8. Letter from Mayor's Advisory Panel on Decentralization of New York City Schools to John V. Lindsay, November 9, 1969.

and policy-making of their children's education. In May of 1967 the Ford Foundation actualized its interest and support for such an experiment by offering the Board of Education over $100,000 as planning grants for three local demonstration districts. The districts chosen were ones that had been actively seeking participation, districts in which the populace were discontented and dissatisfied with what the schools were offering. These districts were comprised of mainly blacks and Puerto Ricans. One was located in Harlem, one on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the other in Brooklyn--Ocean Hill-Brownsville to be exact. The Board of Education welcomed the funds as a means of experimenting with decentralization. It was at this juncture, and only at this juncture, that both the audience, the Ford Foundation and the minority groups, and the constituency, the Board, its bureaucrats and civil servants, agreed. Both wanted some movement toward decentralization. If it could be realized, properly and neatly in a few districts in the city, districts that were the most discontented, politically both groups could win. The Board knew decentralization was coming, whether ideologically they saw it as a means of improving the educational process or not was unimportant, but the winds from the north, Albany, told them it was inevitable. If they offered a crust rather than a slice and succeeded, they could still control the educational system. The audience, on the other hand, saw the possibility of getting a loaf which

would give them more power in city politics--the minority groups would be recognized by the constituency as a viable power bloc--respected and listened to. In addition, education for them might be improved. The foundations would have more eggs in the Lindsay political basket and as a Ford Foundation officials so succinctly put it when discussing his Foundation's role: "We...ultimately chose to make this grant. This is what the Foundation is all about. We choose."[9] Theycould pick and choose areas for reform and innovation -- their money and political clout at City Hall would be an unbeatable combination. What foundation could ask for more? In addition, and highly important, was the need for City Hall to have an outstanding political victory. Lindsay's litany for success was now needed if he were to prove early on in his Administration that he could move the city in a new direction--away from the bureaucracies and union power -- and secure a strong political base for himself. Indeed he was intent on proving Leo Durocher wrong: Good guys could win ballgames and power games. Just wait and see.

The action spotlight focused on one district, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, more than the other two for many reasons, but perhaps most importantly because, like the anxious child who unwrapped its Christmas gift labelled "Do not open until December 25th" beforehand and found an empty box, it dared ask why--why it was empty and why it wasn't to be open until a

9. Melvin Urofsky (ed.), Why Teachers Strike (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), p. 108.

designated date. After all, what difference did it make when it was opened, if it were empty? The innocent question of a child who trusts and believes sometimes involves a very intricate and complex answer.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville was a slum area--social problems tremendous, housing severely deteriorated, unemployment great, narcotic addiction the highest in the country and earning power extremely limited.[10] Educationally the statistics were appalling: most students were at least two years below grade level, over half were behind in basic skills, the high-school dropout rate was over 70% with only about 1% of high school graduates receiving academic diplomas.[11] The area is about 70% black and 25% Puerto Rican. Politically, socially and economically it has been an empty box housing only inflammable fumes. It read "CAUTION" in highly visible large red letters for all to see.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville was never officially designated an experimental district by Board of Education resolution but was recognized as an area for experimentation in various official Board papers.[12] What it meant was some-

10. Naomi Levine, Ocean Hill-Brownsville: Schools in Crisis (New York: Popular Library, 1969), p. 31; Martin Mayer, The Teachers Strike (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 18. Both of these books are thorough accounts of the events that surrounded the confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville during the fall of 1968. For highly specific data on the daily events of the crisis, consult these sources.
11. Urofsky, op. cit., p. 12.
12. Interview with Harold Siegel, Secretary of the Board of

thing rather nebulous. In recognizing an experimental district, the Board said nothing else, except that the district could not expect increased funding. It said nothing positive--as to what the district would do, could do, or what it was to experiment with. With an empty box to start with, the district was looking eagerly for something to put into it. The Board gave them nothing and told them to wait. Inactivity is a difficult trial for anyone, especially those exposed to it for a long time. Planning had begun among community people, teachers, civic leaders and the mayor's office before the summer of 1967 and so it continued, perhaps now at a more rapid pace. Planning centered around what the district needed in order to have a voice in school management.

It was decided early that community leadership would be essential in dealing with the Board of Education, the schools, teachers, principals and parents and in handling the powers and responsibilities that they expected the Board would grant them in the near future to fully realize the possibilities of a decentralized school system. That could best be accomplished with a panel to govern and a manager to administer. By mid-summer they had elected a governing board comprised of parents, teachers, community representatives, school supervisors and a university professor. They in turn

12. Education, June 27, 1972; Board of Education Minutes, April 19, 1967; Letter from Bernard Donovan to Members of the Board of Education re Demonstration Projects, May 8, 1967.

selected a black administrator to carry out their policy. He was Rhody McCoy, an 18-year veteran of the New York City school system and an acting principal of a city school at the time. He knew how the system operated, he had taken the mandated examinations, he had climbed the success ladder slowly and methodically. He evidently knew each rung quite thoroughly. By late August of 1967, Ocean-Hill eagerly notified the Board of their elections and their ability to start operations immediately. The Board officially defined none of their powers.

September 1967 saw the Board of Education rise anew from its summer dormancy and begin to run the school system once again. It was confronted first with a union strike that demanded more money for a UFT sponsored program--More Effective Schools--a compensatory program that delimited class size, beefed up teaching staff and offered more flexible teaching arrangements and curricula to students in the city schools. That conflict was soon settled but new ones arose.

The Ocean-Hill governing board knew there were principal vacancies in its district schools that needed immediate filling. It wanted to have a voice in selecting new ones for if the schools were to offer their children a chance to achieve, they must have in those schools, people who had achieved. However, the criteria for achievement were

different from those of the Board of Examiners: institutionalized pen and pencil examinations that asked few questions about ghetto life and ghetto problems; oral examinations that disqualified one for hard "r's" or whistling "s's". The community planners wanted principals who were different, who had proven themselves in the field, not only on paper, interested in helping fill the community's empty box rather than their own. That meant having the freedom to seek these educators anywhere they were available, whether they were on the Board of Examiners' list, the sole clearinghouse for recruitment in the city schools, or not. The Board still did not move to define the district's powers.

The Governing Board was torn--they had to establish their legitimacy through the central Board in order to be recognized and have a certain definiteness. Therefore, they had to deal with and accede to the Board. On the other hand, the community, who had elected them, expected them to take steps to actively participate in school affairs. They wanted eagerly to commence their duties but couldn't because the Board refused to define them. If they were not to be completely frustrated, they would have to act in the case of the principal vacancies. Perhaps the Board then would realize their urgency to begin operation of the experimental district. So they proceeded to fill those vacancies, four in fact, with

educators they believed were interested in filling the community box. The majority of the names were not from the Board of Examiners' list.

The Board quickly responded, not by announcing the anticipated guidelines for the district's operations, but by contacting Albany.[13]

State Commissioner of Education, James Allen, a public supporter of decentralization, sought to compromise the situation. To allow the governing board to dictate policy to the Board or the union or for that matter the State Education Department would set a precedent that could be bad, causing immediate and highly-charged conflict. He indeed would have to quash that possibility. But to quash the district entirely could destroy the entire plan which he, along with Lindsay's audience, needed politically to get the decentralization legislation they desired from the state. Allen thus decided to take a middle-ground stance--create a special category, a Demonstration School Principalship which would eliminate both the Board of Examiners' listees for the present and union pressure.[14] This would of necessity have to be an "acting" position, no legitimate one with tenure rights. But Ocean-Hill had something to fill its empty box.

13. Interview with Jack Landers, Deputy Superintendent for Decentralization, Board of Education, April 25, 1972.

14. Board of Education Minutes, September 27, 1967.

It was a victory for them because they felt they at least had secured recognition from the Board and to a certain extent legitimacy. Perhaps now they could get some money from the Board.

To have a designated amount set aside for planning was something, but to run schools and a district office was another. How much, how allocated, how managed, were difficult questions that no one seemed to have answers to. The Ford Foundation announced another grant to the district, this time funnelled through Queens College's Institute for Community Studies. But that was not what the district was talking about--they were talking about lump sum allocations for the district's schools and McCoy's office, the Unit Administrator, for letting their own contracts for building repairs and maintenance of schools, for controlling the actual management of the district, for fiscal independence. The Board reiterated its position: little funds could be expected.

By the end of 1967, the Board issued a set of guidelines for the demonstration districts that merely "...empowered (them) to determine policy...within the large framework set by the Board of Education in accordance with its prescribed legal obligations, and in accordance with state law and the requirements of the Board of Regents and the State Department of Education."[15] Again, this action was as nebulous as the

15. Board of Education Advisory and Evaluation Committee on School Decentralization, Suggested Guidelines for Demonstration Projects on Decentralization (mimeographed, December 6, 1967), p. 3.

official designation of the districts. Ocean Hill rejected these guidelines, wanting more specific authority. The Board paused, the governing board was frustrated. Rather than contacting Allen, 110 Livingston Street set about to create a decentralization liaison office and named a director to oversee its operation. The director, a long-time friend of the Superintendent of Schools, had little knowledge of the districts involved, the Board's steps toward enunciating a decentralization policy, or the history of integration and its failure in the city.[16] Without expertise, he could not function, he could not even begin to draw up a Board-demonstration district agreement which the governing board desparately wanted, to define its powers. The Superintendent of Schools, however, must have been pleased with his choice and the director's performance for he remained at the helm of the office during the 1968 school crisis.

Ocean Hill became increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated as months passed in 1968. They received little recognition from the Board. The three items that were all so important if their experiment was to have meaning, seemed to be crumbling: money, personnel and leadership. Money--none. They could expect no lump sum budget allocations for their schools or the district office. They had received no power

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16. Interview with Jack Landers, op. cit.

to engage contractors for maintenance of their schools. Livingston Street was the custodian of that and they had no way of wresting any money from it. They did not control the coffers. Personnel--few. They got their principals in the elementary schools but that was all, and even those positions were being challenged in court. Assistant principals were replaced with Board of Examiner listees and junior high school principals were excluded from the Demonstration Principalship category. Leadership--shaky. Internally, Ocean Hill had felt the impact of the Rev. Martin Luther King's assassination earlier in 1968 like all black ghetto communities throughout the country--boycotts, fires, sporadic conflicts. Discontent loomed large and the sight of an empty box after so many months was frustrating and a constant reminder of their powerlessness. Nothing really had been gained since 1967--something had to be done. Ocean Hill would demand recognition. Since money was almost impossible to get, there would be little point in engineering a confrontation on that item. Their leadership, the governing board and McCoy, were subject to community criticisms and harassment, but changing horses in mid-stream would not readily secure recognition from the central Board.

Seizing upon the issue of the quality of personnel that would teach in their schools was the only viable course. McCoy more than anyone else saw it as the sole way of gaining

recognition. The Christmas package had been opened and there was nothing inside. They had nothing to lose educationally and politically they had a possibility of getting something. The schools would become theirs. After all, they could count on the mayor's support. Lindsay was publicly committed to the demonstration districts.

> The Governing Board of Ocean Hill-Brownsville Demonstration School District has voted to end your employment in the schools of this District....This termination of employment is to take effect immediately.[17]

On May 9, 1968, nineteen professional educators in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Demonstration District received the above message. It was a message that would resound from Riverdale to Canarsie in the following months. It would be interpreted and reinterpreted by all the participants, by erudite journalists, by scholars, by plain folk. But in reality it would come to mean only one thing. The empty box would be no more. Either it would be filled according to the owner's terms or else it would be destroyed. Ocean Hill had gone for broke.

Chaos ensued. The Board refused to transfer the teachers out of the district, some 300 district teachers

17. Letter (portion of) from Governing Board to terminated educational personnel at Ocean Hill-Brownsville, May 9, 1968. (See Levine, op. cit., p. 52).

supported the 19 teachers, classes went unmanned and Rhody McCoy then terminated the employment of the 300. The district schools of necessity were forced to close before the official end of school that spring. Item 2 resolved itself into an unanswered controversy: did the governing board dismiss or transfer the 19 teachers?

Undoubtedly, the governing board did not have the right to fire teachers; they had neither hired them nor preferred written charges against them. As far as transferral was concerned, the Superintendent of Schools had the sole power to transfer teaching and supervisory personnel,[18] and the governing board could not assume that power.

The union responded instinctively to protect its members rights: teachers could not be involuntarily transferred or dismissed unless certain legal steps were taken, and they involved written charges, substantiating evidence, a hearing and possible appeal. The Board agreed. Ocean Hill didn't. McCoy stated that the community had the right to decide who would and who would not teach in its schools and, therefore, to present formal charges would mean that the decision would be made according to the Board and the UFT's rules. That left Ocean Hill without anything. That underminded the entire purpose of the confrontation--the schools would never be theirs.

18. Board of Education By-Laws, Article II, Section 10.1.

The answer was no, calmly and deliberately no. Pressure from the mayor's office and other audience participants began to grow though. After all, so the audience reasoned, Ocean Hill were the good guys, and ones truly interested in the education of their children, and if they presented evidence buttressing the poor teaching performance of certain individuals, any impartial hearing examiner would see the merit of their case and dismiss the teachers.[19] This way it would be legal and remove the union from the picture. The bad guys would be destroyed. Of course, to prove poor teaching performance would be a difficult task. However, Ocean Hill needed their support, especially the mayor's if there were to be any contest at all. McCoy acquiesced.[20] Thus, before the end of the school semester, a highly regarded Negro judge had been selected by the Board to hear the cases against the nineteen teachers. Charges were presented by Ocean Hill. These hearings would take a good part of the summer. Hopefully, it would cool things down and solve the problem.

Politically things had to cool down. Lindsay knew that any decentralization plan getting through the legislature that year was going to be rough and antagonizing the situation wouldn't help. Rockefeller, in the midst of a campaign bid

19. Mayer, op. cit., p. 52.

20. New York Times, September 25, 1968.

for the presidency, wasn't about to sponsor any decentralization law with turmoil and illegality running rampant in his own state. How would that look in the South? Undoubtedly, Commissioner Allen got the word from the Mansion to keep things quiet at Ocean Hill, at least through the July Republican Convention. The word understandably was passed to City Hall and 110 Livingston Street. The summer was, for all outward appearances, quiet.

On August 26, with the Republican Convention over and Rockefeller out of the race and a decentralization law in Lindsay's hand, Judge Rivers found "...that (the) evidence is insufficient in each case to sustain the necessary burden of proof"[21] and thus made the following recommendation: "That the request made by Rhody A. McCoy, Unit Administrator, to the Superintendent of Schools to transfer out of the Ocean Hill Brownsville Demonstration School District (certain teachers) BE DENIED."[22]

McCoy and the governing board felt betrayed and refused to abide by the Rivers' decision claiming that a request for transfer did not require a hearing.[23] However, the logic of their statements were difficult to follow. Yes, they

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21. Report and Recommendations of Frances E. Rivers, Esq., Special Trial Examiner , August 26, 1968, p. 17.

22. Ibid.

23. New York Times, September 24, 1968.

claimed in the beginning that their action was merely a transferral of certain teachers, which by practice required no formal charges being made, but having succumbed to the pressure of their allies, they presented written charges and evidence which were forthwith submitted to a trial examiner. In so doing, they acknowledged in practice, if not in theory, that they were following dismissal procedures. They made their mistake in playing by the establishment's rules yet they could not very likely turn back now. If anything, in retrospect, their allies were their undoing very early on in the crisis.

In any event, Ocean Hill had to play out its hand. They refused to take back the teachers, both those they initially terminated on May 9 and those that sympathized with the 19. They hired their own teachers to man their classes. What followed were three strikes, charges and countercharges, agreements made, agreements broken, agreements cancelled, racist retorts, unleashed tempers, no education for over one million school children and a catastrophic crisis in leadership throughout the city. Utopia could not be found under Thomas More's name in a library catalogue tray.

The central Board of Education, traditionally believed to be an independent, impartial panel of laymen, dedicated to the making of sound educational policy for the

best interests of all the city's children was decidedly not a strong proponent of decentralization, let alone community control. Before Lindsay was able to increase Board membership and select his own members in late June and the early summer of 1968, the Board was comprised of Wagner appointees, labor-oriented, pragmatic people who saw only trouble ahead with sudden decentralization. Undoubtedly, this feeling was buttressed by the information they received or didn't receive or half-received from the Superintendent and his staff. They knew there were problems at Ocean Hill but relied on Donovan's information. As one Board president recounted: "Donovan sold us down the river."[24] He said "...he had the situation at Ocean Hill under control and that there would be no problems."[25] The Board inquired no farther. They either initially believed what he said or wanted to believe it so hard that they convinced themselves of its validity. They took then a rather inactive role throughout 1967 and the spring and summer of 1968 with the exception of selecting Judge Rivers' as trial examiner. Meanwhile by late summer the membership of the Board had been expanded by the decentralization law and began to change. First William Haddad, a poverty program advocate and then Rev. Milton Galamison,

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24. Interview with Rose Shapiro, President of the Board of Education in 1967-68, April 17, 1972.

25. Ibid.

a civil rights leader of the early 1960's and a well-thought of spokesman for the black people, especially in Ocean Hill, joined the team. Both these members confirmed Donovan's announced statements that an agreement would be reached before September without any serious problems. Again the Board believed. They watched and waited.

By September 7th, the Board issued a press release stating that it "regretfully has just notified the mayor and the State Education Commissioner that...a compromise solution between the UFT and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration project (has) not been fruitful. The Board now wants to make clear that the 10 (9 of the original 19 had transferred to other schools and were not about to engage in the controversy) teachers must be reinstated and that it expects its legal authority be honored by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville project."[26] Its legal authority was still, of course, intact but what power and influence it had was questionable. Daily press releases announced its demand for settlement.[27] Each day the strike continued. The Board when it did move, only vacillated. First it recognized the governing board, then suspended it, then declared it illegitimate.[28] The governing

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26. Press Release, Board of Education, September 7, 1968.

27. Press Releases, Board of Education, September-November, 1968.

28. Urofsky, op. cit., p. 17.

board continued to operate, it ignored the central Board. The Board could not lead, it waited too long. John Doar, a civil rights and Justice Department figure, was appointed to the Board by Lindsay and sought to fill the Board's leadership vacuum. During the strike he was elected its president. But in trying to take a strong position, he defeated his own purpose and rendered the Board completely impotent. He saw the situation as strictly a legal question, a question of compliance, devoid of the politics of the situation, the need of absolute protection guarantees to Shanker for his teachers and the need of Ocean Hill to stand firm at its school doors, letting in only those they decided should be admitted. Jockeying between these needs would be almost impossible for the most astute politician. When Doar declared he would, in essence, break the strike--the unions saw red and replied in kind--they instructed all custodial union members to virtually close down the mechanical operations of the schools. They broke him.

Superintendent of Schools Bernard Donovan would prove somewhat more difficult to break. Bernard Donovan was a career bureaucrat. He had been with the Board of Education for many years and knew the ropes well. Although it seemed he would be passed over for the top job in the school system when Calvin Gross was selected Superintendent of Schools in the early 1960s, he had only to wait a few years. Gross was

out and the Board badly shaken sought out someone who knew the system thoroughly. Donovan quietly assumed office and like any man who was first rejected and then selected, he knew the power scales tipped in his favor--they needed him and all knew it. Donovan thus sat in a very comfortable position. Although not noted for strong ideas or programs, he knew how to improvise and that spelled success for him.[29] He stressed inaction whenever possible and only made a hard and fast decision when a crisis was imminent. Then the action would tend to be rash though, taking positions that would get him and his system off the hook with little regard for future consequences. His bureaucrats usually covered him and things more often than not worked out all right. But Ocean Hill proved more difficult. It was Donovan's obligation to apprise the Board of the activities of the Ocean Hill demonstration district in the spring and summer of 1968 and to have competent staff dealing with liaison work. But in point of fact, his one activity was to try to protect his own constituency--the bureaucracy and its centralized decision-making power. To remain inactive and not delegate or define demonstration districts' powers, any action on their parts could be questioned. Hopefully, they would be quietly defined as powerless entities. As has been reported in an interview he gave:

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29. Interview with Jack Landers, op. cit.

30. Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell and Richard Magat, Community Control and the Urban School (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 145.

> What were we trying? We were trying just one thing, to set up districts....But before we could come to firm agreement on the framework, the powers, and the interpretation, Ocean Hill-Brownsville went off first and had an election of its own without telling us anything about it, elected their own board and got all ready and said, "Here we are, c'mon, deal with us." Frankly, one thing led to another in a most inadvertent way. We never recognized the board officially but we dealt with it, unofficially....[31]

Thus in dealing with them, even unofficially, Donovan made his mistake, he acknowledged their existence. He was foiled then from the start and with Rhody McCoy he knew he would have to be constantly on his toes, for here was one of his former men, who knew how the rules could be used, when to follow them and when to circumvent them, in essence to get what one wanted with the least amount of trouble. Donovan also knew that McCoy was an improviser, would hold off action, giving each participant a different view of the problem, totally confuse all involved except himself, and then would move. He knew too that McCoy had his own constituency to serve and they wanted some of Donovan's power. Nowhere could the two adversaries meet. They both knew it and the question of whether or not McCoy asked Donovan for the transfer of the subject teachers or whether or not Donovan acquiesced was really unimportant. The teachers were merely a tool for whittling.

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31. Urofsky, op. cit., p. 195.

The populace was generally confused by all the events at Ocean Hill. The citizenry broke down basically into two groups: the middle-class--civil servants, union, white and blue collar workers who saw decentralization as a threatening force. It saw Lindsay as primarily concerned with the minorities' interests and not theirs.[32] They were relatively secure with the services they were getting and although improvement could be had, any thoughts of community control or decentralization, since both words were used interchangeably, meant only one thing to them--decrease in their power and increase in black power. The other half of the citizenry, the highly educated, wealthier, upper-middle class New Yorkers saw community participation, if not community control, as an adroit master plan of the Lindsay Administration, a plan they supported strongly. If the city could be saved, this was the way of doing it.

When the Ocean Hill confrontation fumed and broke out into a raging fire, rational and emotional thinking got so intertwined that expected positions of civic groups changed radically. The Public Education Association, a strong vocal force for education sans politics and a supporter of the educational meritocracy, opted for the Ocean Hill position and left the Board, its teachers and bureaucracy high and dry. It supported a community controlled system, one where minorities

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32. Hentoff, A Political Life: The Education of John V. Lindsay, op. cit., p. 331.

would have a chance to control their own futures. Due process they felt was not the issue and they regarded the union as community control's adversary. The organization broke within itself at this time, with the old line liberals staking their claims with due process and unionism, the protection of individual rights, and the new liberals staking theirs with Lindsay's minorities.[33]

The New York Civil Liberties Union met with much the same fate, with the majority of its membership striking out for the Ocean Hill community only after much heated debate.[34] In its now famous report, The Burden of Blame, the organization that traditionally had championed the cause of due process stated: "Indeed, we find the charges that existing standards of due process are seriously threatened by community control unfounded, both in theory and fact....Our examination of the record has persuaded us that the chaos was not a result of local community control. On the contrary, we are persuaded that the chaos resulted from efforts to undermind local community control...that from the beginning the central Board of Education attempted to scuttle the experiment in Ocean Hill-Brownsville....That the United Federation of Teachers has used 'due process' as a smokescreen....That the major burden of blame

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33. Interview with Frederick McLaughlin, Director of Public Education Association, August 21, 1969.

34. New York Times, December 3, 1968.

for the chaos in Ocean Hill-Brownsville must fall on the central Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers."[35] Although NYCLU and PEA clearly and unambiguously stated the facts as they saw them, or wanted to see them, one fact is inescapable: by the submission of written charges against the 19 teachers, Ocean Hill acceded to the officially defined rules of the game--due process being one of them.

> What McCoy did was unique, was different, was unlike anything that was ever done. It was not that Rhody McCoy was doing the same as anybody else. We decided to pick up on it. It just couldn't happen. It would have set a very bad precent.[36]

So stated Albert Shanker, President of the United Federation of Teachers, the largest union in the United States. Indeed, Shanker played a large role in this crisis, for in fact he too was asking: "Who in fact had the real power in New York City"? Brought into this question was an interesting study of labor in an urban metropolis. Historically, labor struggled for recognition long and diligently before the New Deal. The liberals of the day supported the movement and its eventual recognition. Many of those liberals were Jewish. The largest union, the UFT, was now primarily Jewish, for having been excluded from the professions, best practices, firms

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35. New York Civil Liberties Union, Burden of Blame (New York: NYCLU, 1968), pp. 1-2.

36. Urofsky, op. cit., p. 165.

and banks before World War II, Jewish men and women swarmed into such fields as teaching and social work.[37] They had fought for professional status and protection of their rights and gained them slowly. Unions had become legitimate and were recognized as a bloc with clout. They quickly learned how to use it and like their Ocean Hill-Brownsville friends with an empty box for so long, they they treasured the elements they began to store up in theirs. No one was going to steal it from them without a strong political fight. They were pretty confident of the results too, for not only did they have political clout as a result of union solidarity, they had clout in city government generally. They had since World War II entered the professions, built up their firms, taken over the New York real estate industry, were active in the arts, commanded the intellectual circles, moved in and out of the power circles in the city. As Moynihan and Glazer point out, they literally "outclassed their competition"[38] -- mainly contented Catholic district leaders and party regulars. They began to take over the Democratic Party machinery and by the mid to late sixties had succeeded. They helped to ride Lindsay into City Hall and would now collect certain IOU's as both union and party supporters.

As the picture focuses one can see the shadows and counter-shadows even more clearly. These teachers were

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37. Nathaniel Weyl, The Jew in American Politics (New York: Arlington House, 1968), p. 175.

38. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan "How the Catholics Lost Out to the Jewis in New York Politics," New York Magazine, August 10, 1970, pp. 41-43

threatened. They were Jewish by and large, their people controlled the unions and had a large stake in the political power of the city. Although they empathized with the black problem, they also saw the shadows of their struggle many years past. That would remain with them throughout the confrontation and each time they were denied entry into an Ocean Hill-Brownsville school they would have to exercise their political muscle. If they stopped, it would atrophy and they too would be back in Brownsville, or so they envisioned. Shanker, was merely their leader. He tended to their needs well. If he didn't some one else would. They would not be leaderless. Perhaps the ill-will levelled at Shanker by Lindsay's audience can be explained in terms of his power through the unions and bureaucracies and his leadership and united constituency, for power among the other participants was so diffused and fragmented as to be barely visible and leadership and unity were totally absent. Shanker had the things everyone else wanted, and he wasn't about to give any of it up until his teachers were comfortably ensconced in <u>their</u> schools.

But the minorities wanted to run <u>their</u> schools and Lindsay knew he had a very special problem. He had to do something visible and dynamic. After all, 42% had voted for him. His role on their behalf has been analyzed time and again. The analyses usually focus only on the crisis during the fall of 1968 in education. However, it was during the spring and summer of 1968, if not earlier, that John Lindsay

had to move and show leadership and mayoralty power for the minorities if he were to accomplish anything for them in education. It was the time and only time during the entire crisis that he had to stand up to the white marble and show what he was really all about--an idealogue, a new breed reformer, an astute politician, a crusader.

Certainly he didn't push the Board to recognize Ocean-Hill when the district sought legitimacy, he hadn't been able to curb the power of the educational bureaucracy, he hadn't negotiated with the participants to reduce the threat of a city-wide school strike, he hadn't fought hard and long nor gained various kinds of supporters to win the decentralization war. Shanker called the city-wide strike in September. In a broadcast from Gracie Mansion on October 1, almost one month in to the strike, Lindsay told New Yorkers: "I want to make it absolutely clear that no further disturbance of this sort will be tolerated. The stakes are too high. If we do not retain education under law, we will have neither education nor law.[39] It was, however, a little late to say that. Everyone knew that there was neither.

Why? The more research done, the more heat generated, the more square pegs are found in round holes. Education was indeed involved closely and intimately with politics. Lindsay had only to look at LaGuardia or Wagner to confirm it. The

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39. Press Release, Office of the Mayor, October 1, 1968.

support needed by any mayor, no matter how worthy the cause, had to be phenomenal to move the education wheel one centimeter.

Lindsay created an Office of Education Liaison to marshal just that support and maintain it for him.[40] His first mistake was to leave the office vacant for over a year after his inaugural. When he did fill it he made his second mistake. He chose a man whose credentials were impressive, for David Seeley was an Assistant Commissioner for Equal Educational Opportunity at the U.S. Office of Education and had been an aide to Francis Keppel, one of the prestigious members of Lindsay's audience. However, although Seeley had been born in New York, he had never lived here and had little knowledge of the city, its politics and leaders, let alone its educational politics. To bring a man into warfare without equipment, can only end disasterously. Seeley eagerly assumed his duties in 1967 and plunged into the decentralization waters. His lines of contact with Ocean Hill were open and although he could never contact the mayor directly and seldom reached his closest aides at City Hall to discuss all the political ramifications of the demonstration district's activities, he knew one thing--that the fumes in the empty box were about to explode and when they did a five-alarm fire would result. Without direct communication with the mayor, without

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40. Mitchell Sviridoff, Report on Reorganization of City Departments, (Fall, 1966), pp. 33-37.

any mandate or powers to negotiate with the governing board, without any credibility at the central Board, Seeley saw the sparks ignite. Powerless, Seeley resigned.[41] The mayor did not move. He merely accepted Seeley's resignation. Board members during the time expressed disillusionment and sometimes anger when they could not get through to the mayor on an urgent matter. The president of the board flatly stated that the mayor played little to no role vis-a-vis the Board in the seething spring months of 1968.[42] The mayor's lack of interference was caused undoubtedly by various factors: the passage of the decentralization bill, the enlarging of the central board's membership and the lackluster support of the board generally for decentralization. These were not his appointees. There was no sense in dealing with them. Illustrative of this view was his attitude with a board member, one who knew the nuts and bolts of the school system, who had been intimately connected with the civil rights movement early on, who held close personal friendships with city negro leaders but one who was not totally committed to community control. This board member requested the mayor to take a public stand to secure the safety of the school system at one point in the Ocean Hill controversy. The mayor announced he would only do it at the public request of the Board, there-

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41. Interview with David Seeley, Education Liaison, Lindsay Administration, September 26, 1969.

42. Telephone interview with Alfred Giardino, former President of the Board of Education, Lindsay Administration, April 12, 1972.

fore, hopefully protecting his credibility with the black community. The Board member refused. Lindsay furious with such intransigence, attacked the attitudes and feelings of the Board member at a large meeting, indirectly accusing the member of racism, bigotry and ignorance, saying: "What do you know about the black community anyway"? He was quickly informed of long and continued activities and service on behalf of civil rights by the member. The mayor simply rose, stalked out of the room, slamming the door behind him.[43]

Lindsay certainly didn't go to Donovan. The bureaucrats too were the enemy and could only be dealt with by a new-enlightened Board. And that's where Lindsay seemed to place all his trust. He couldn't perceive that the Board had no power, was beholden to so many, especially to Donovan and his staff, their own images and interests. When the crunch came and he asked the Board to close down JHS 271 in Ocean Hill, a source of trouble and a demand of the union, the Board voted to open it, therefore protecting their interests in the Ocean Hill community. Lindsay countermanded their decision. The Lindsay Board engagement, let alone the marriage, was forevermore abandoned.

He met the union at City Hall and Gracie Mansion, only because he had to--their power was too great to ignore.

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43. Interview with Rose Shapiro, former member and President of the Board of Education, Lindsay Administration, op. cit.

He said in essence over and over: "The city belongs to all of us. And they looked at him as if he were crazy. What's that got to do with it"?[44] They had their own interests to protect and if it meant exposing and crashing sacred myths about education or anything else that was too bad for indeed it had to be acknowledged that the Board of Education was in fact a political body--that could only be challenged with political power.[45]

The mayor had support from the Ocean Hill governing board in the beginning. Indeed the confrontation was engineered with the view that victory might be possible because the mayor would support them. Lindsay knew too he had to pledge support of these districts to maintain any coalition. Because he had not moved to help define the district's powers earlier, he would now be forced publicly to move. During the spring and summer his only efforts were to convince the teachers to transfer out, alleviating a future confrontation. When that failed he convinced the governing board to prefer written charges against the nineteen. His advisers should have know the danger in that--it was extremely difficult to prove poor teaching performance. But, in any event, he moved in that direction and both he and Ocean Hill played right into the hands of the union. With the Rivers' decision, McCoy and the

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44. Hentoff, A Political Life: The Education of John V. Lindsay, op. cit.

45. The Public Life, Vol. 1, #4 (December 2, 1968).

governing board knew that they had no protector. No one to define their rights and privileges or solve their problems. They would have to, and did, do most of it alone. Their sense of betrayal ran through all the succeeding negotiations. One Ocean Hill spokesman stated: "I hate very much to see the mayor...hold down this community while the union rapes it."[46] Although Lindsay continued to denounce the union and the power brokers throughout the fall, Ocean Hill knew he was seeking out labor with every concession imaginable.

In playing this dual role, Wagner was a master, for it was a signal to the participants that real covert negotiations were about to begin, but with Lindsay it destroyed whatever power he had left. His participants saw it as a signal of duplicity and it encouraged further distrust on their part. As distrust and non-belief grow, one never is satisfied with half a loaf from the enemy, the betrayed demands the whole loaf.[47] As a result, the loaf is torn apart and only crumbs remain. And unlike the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, these crumbs fed no one and everyone lost.

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46. New York Times, September 25, 1968.

47. William A. Gamson, Power and Discontent (Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1968), p. 45.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS

It was the primary goal of this study to ascertain whether politics were involved in educational policy-making in New York City and to what extent the mayor participated. Further, it sought to ascertain through case studies of particular educational crises, what kind of a role the mayor played and whether he was effective in that role. It was the hope that in analyzing decision-making procedures in an historical context, one could uncover facts and conclusions about the governance of education today.

One obvious, inescapable fact that has emerged from these studies is that politics and education have been closely intertwined in New York City's history. Even more pointedly, one is forced to conclude that the mayor has usually played a prominent role in educational crises, for when problems arose, the citizenry, along with the crisis participants, looked to the mayor for direction and solutions. He was the one who more often than not had to negotiate, compromise, evaluate. He had to try to fill the leadership

vacuum, he had to assume responsibility.

Although these studies were spread over a period of almost 25 years, it was interesting to see that many elements and characteristics of the crises were similar. The failure of the schools to perform, to offer services that the citizenry demanded was blamed on the bureaucratic structure of the Board--one that was closed vis-a-vis the community. Witness both the Karelson Human Relations Committee in 1945 and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration district in 1968. Questions of corruption and graft, poor maintenance of schools, have been brought up time and time again as accidents occur or huge school construction programs are undertaken or neophyte politicians look for a stake in an impending political contest.

Besides issues, the power group line-ups have usually followed a set pattern, with the exception of the Lindsay crisis. The myth of education devoid from politics has been perpetuated by good government groups, civic associations, the media, the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools and educational organizations. Cries of interference on the part of these groups have been directly levelled at mayors and have caused them to either retreat from the educational scene quickly or lose the confrontation dramatically.

Ironically, though, many of these individuals and groups initially implored the intervention of the mayor when a crisis developed.

The most astounding common characteristic that emerges in all three of these studies is the diffused and fragmented role of leadership in education. As organizationally structured, the Board of Education is comprised of lay individuals who formulate educational policy. The Superintendent of Schools, a professional educator, implements and administers the Board's policy. In reality, the roles and duties are often reversed or intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to determine who made decisions, who formulated a given policy, who issued guidelines and who saw to their implementation. Thus, to charge the Board or the Superintendent and his bureaucracy with duties and responsibilities, becomes an impossible task. To ask them to be responsible and to account becomes absurd.

Because then of this lack of accountability, when crisis ensued, the leadership function has been often transferred to the chief magistrate of the city--the mayor.

Mayors have usually reacted positively to this mandate. Certainly each felt that education was an important aspect of city life and a key to understanding and perhaps solving some of the problems of the city.

LaGuardia relished the challenge. Education, as has been shown, was an area where he had a special interest. He felt the office of the mayor encompassed all city services and sought overtly to effect a decision-making role--his Gary Plan and Bureau of Supplies episodes are excellent examples in education. He failed in achieving an effective role in these situations, along with the Karelson crisis, because he neglected to account for the high political stock of the Board, its bureaucracy and/or the educational constituency. They thrived on a system that was considered too special for ordinary political treatment and used it successfully to ward off interference. LaGuardia always set about for open confrontations in education--his power against the myth. The myth usually won. The city was not ready to have anyone tear down those sacred walls, what with war raging and races clashing in the 1940's. The citizenry saw politics in terms of the avaricious Tammany tiger and did not want it infiltrating the schools. It was pretty much an emotional, rather than rational, reaction. LaGuardia couldn't open their eyes. And to work quietly to circumvent the myth was not his style. He was not effective.

Wagner was aware of the educational dilemma. He believed that politics was the art of doing what was possible and used that yardstick in all his dealings with municipal problems, especially education. He treated the Board

of Education as a truly independent body, responsible for forming and implementing its own policies and programs. His role was one of counsel and advisement and an energetic force only when authorized by the Board. When called upon to exercise power his activities were generally covert, thus being able to work quietly and effectively as chief magistrate of the city. He could apply pressure and coordinate means and ends without causing crises, for he knew the pulse of the city and the people who controlled that pulse were either his personal and/or political friends. A simple phone call or Gracie Mansion meeting could solve most crises. Wagner reacted to problems slowly and quietly, only became directly and openly involved as a last resort. The Cogen strike threat and the 1961 scandal are good examples of his technique. His view of the office was that of a mediator or arbitrator. As a result, he was not thrown into open contests with powerful segments of the city and his role was not questioned. His power remained within its office and tended to enhance and strengthen his hand in succeeding encounters. He tended more often than not to be successful--he was reelected in 1961 almost on the education-home rule issue alone.

Lindsay, on the other hand, saw education as a top priority issue, one that had to be dealt with openly and directly for he felt the city had changed drastically in

the last 20 years. Education was not meeting expectations of any class of society and the newly emerging minorities were asking, and justifiably so, for a piece of the pie. Their one hope of socio-economic advancement they believed rested in education. The power leaders of the various communities had changed too, the A. Phillip Randolphs and Whitney Youngs were no longer the sole spokesmen for the black, for local groups were now speaking for themselves. Realizing that change was necessary and that the entrenched bureaucracy was immovable, he reinforced his view for openness by seeking to react immediately and directly to each education problem. Thus exercise of mayoralty power must be that of the initiator-innovator and reaction to crises must be overt. These views became inherent in his philosophy of the office. As a result, Lindsay was constantly testing his power with other segments--the Board, the Superintendent, the bureaucracy, parents, teachers and the like. In testing his power, he unfortunately lost sight of his goal and after the devastating confrontation at Ocean Hill learned how an office can be weakened and innovations crumbled by flexing power too often, too openly and too inexpertly.

What emerges then is the fact that traditionally mayors have been unsuccessful when they try to shatter the education-sans-politics myth openly. Wagner exercised leader-

ship, the one ingredient so desparately missing in educational policy-making, quietly and covertly, publicly challenging no one, and thus was effective. It was an important advance, not only for Wagner politically, but for education generally, for it made individuals both in and out of 110 Livingston Street realize that mayoralty influence could be beneficial and advantageous. By the 1960's, Wagner then had placed a wedge in the school door. Lindsay tried earnestly to open that door wider and perhaps could have if the instrument he used to ply the hinges loose, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, was not so sharp and threatening. Besides that, he had to exercise strong leadership throughout--from the very beginning, especially the initial stages--he didn't and thus the door slammed shut. Wagner's wedge withered.

The door closed but the chapter is not at an end. Education has become more and more integrated into the life of the city, the delivery of services, the future; and if school programs become more and more integrated with other municipal services they will be involved openly in politics. This will call even more urgently today for skillful performance of the political brokerage function but with a vacuum in educational leadership, no one will be held responsible for this function. Those who are brokers are not responsible to education for while the school system has achieved protection

from politics, politicians have alsoachieved some protection from the issues that plague the schools. Should a mayor be held accountable for another large problem area when he too can fall back on the argument that the schools should be non-political? That has been a very real question.

But political problems--and indeed education has been seen to be intimately involved with politics--require political solutions. The city's political institutions are then involved as a matter of fact. It no longer is a question or an alternative. It becomes a matter of survival. As one superintendent of schools of another large urban city said when discussing the political nature of education: "You've got to be at the table when the pie is cut up, otherwise, you don't get any of it."[1] That applies to money, power, influence.

Further, it may also be argued that the city's various problems need to be handled through an integrated policy rather than in little lumps unrelated to each other. The close interconnections among education, housing, welfare and health illustrate the need for coordination. Too, "public regardingness," that middle-class political ethos emphasizing the obligation to seek the good of the community "as a whole" implying honesty, impartiality and efficiency[2] should be

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1. Peter Binzen, "Philadelphia: Politics Invades the Schools," Saturday Review (February 5, 1972), p. 49.

2. Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, op. cit., p. 41. See also pp. 46, 234-235.

advanced if the city as a community is to survive. Groups battling for small, conflicting interests can be detrimental to large urban centers struggling to remain intact. An overseer, a custodian of the city's interests is thus essential to advance policies that are in the public's interest. Wagner, with his level two approach, was able to accomplish just this function by acting as overseer, custodian of the interests of the city at large.

There remains the issue of leadership and accountability. Education is in need of strong leadership. Since the mayor has been called on often to intervene in educational crises, why not officially and legally vest him with the powers necessary to be effective.

One method of allowing the mayor to take a direct role in education is through the appointment of a commissioner of education, who serves at the pleasure of the mayor with the consent of either the City Council and/or the Board of Regents and State Commissioner of Education. He would assume the duties of the central Board of Education and its Chancellor, dealing directly with the local community school boards. As Max Rubin, a Regent and former President of the Board of Education announced, "...the important point is that final responsibility and authority in all areas now divided among the jurisdictions of the central agency would repose in this

single commissioner.[3] He goes on further to state the crux of the educational problem of governance: "It is important that we clearly delineate responsibility. Today there is diffusion where there should be focus....Accountability is impossible when responsibility is scattered...."[4]

With such a shift, the mayor then would be directly responsible. He would be accountable. There would be no playing of hide-'n'-seek by either the educational establishment or the mayor. The former would have to perform, to account to an elected official. The elected official in turn would have to account to his various constituencies. It could be an open, realistic and hopefully healthy interchange of politics and education.

This is only one means of achieving what is the first and most important need for education today--the recognition of the fact that politics and education must work together if the school systems in urban areas are to be effectively governed.

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3. Max J. Rubin, "New York City Needs a Commissioner of Education," New York University Education Quarterly (New York: NYU, Winter, 1972), p. 4.

4. Ibid., pp. 4, 6.

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